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ਤੰਦ'ਹੁਦ'ਪਨ'ਘੁਸਾ'ਸ਼੍ਰੀ'ਸਾਰਕ'ਤ੍ਰਿ'ਕਿਂਗ'ਸੀ'ਖਦ'ਕੌ'

# A Northeastern Tibetan Childhood

by

ਕੌਂਚੰਦ'ਬੁਮਾ| Tsering Bum

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SUMMARY: Tsering Bum (b. 1985) describes his early life in Amdo in terms of dreams, herding, punishment from a lama, schooling experiences, attending a Kalachakra teaching, a *lhatzi* gathering, irrigation, his grandfather, archery, and other important moments and influences.

FRONT COVER: Khyunstod Lhatzi. Kgeiwa Village, Monch Township, Montson (Guinan) County, Tsolho (Hainan) Prefecture, Tsowon (Qinghai) Province (Tsering Bum 2009).

BACK COVER: Kgeiwa Village fields during summer, with Lhetsang Monastery in the distance (Tsering Bum 2009).



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NOTE: This is an edited version of Tsering Bum. 2007. *A Northeastern Tibetan Childhood*. Xining City: Plateau Publications.

# ACCLAIM

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**A**nother incredible production from Kevin Stuart's Tibetan English students! Tsering Bum gives us a series of intricately woven vignettes of his childhood and adolescence in a small Tibetan village in Qinghai Province. *A Northeastern Tibetan Childhood* takes readers into the social and material culture of Tsering's family and fellow villagers. We begin with a home scene on the heated brick *hyitsi* 'bed', where the family sleeps, meals are taken, and guests are entertained. Through Tsering's writing we taste the noodles his mother makes by hand, know the life of the herders, meet ritualists who communicate with the mountain deity, visit a Kalachakra for blessings, experience an archery contest that ends in singing and drink, swim naked in cold mountain rivers, celebrate Losar, or Tibetan new year festival, visit a nomad festival, enter the transformative world of a county primary school, and hear the accounts of three deaths. The stories take us through a landscape of mountains, rivers, and grasslands to new worlds that for the narrator end with a kindled sense of global vision and self-worth. *Mark Bender, Ohio State University*

I highly recommend this exciting new work. Tsering Bum's account of his life is a quick and pleasant read, full of insights into many aspects of contemporary Tibetan culture. From village rituals associated with death and archery contests to the challenges of modern schooling in rural areas, Tsering Bum leads us quickly through a narrative that links past and present to hopes for the future. Tibetan Buddhism and mountain pilgrimage play a limited but significant role in the story. As a historian, I was most interested in the chapter 'Grandpa' that recounts the poorly documented but well-known troubles the Amdo Tibetans faced under the warlord Ma Bufang. *Gray Tuttle, Leila Hadley Luce Assistant Professor of Modern Tibetan Studies, Columbia University*

This collection offers a poignant, insightful series of vignettes on life in Tibetan communities. At a time when much attention is focused on macro issues of state institutions, nationalities policies, and international implications related to China and Tibet, this study is a welcome correction that reminds readers of the human stories that are the foundation for understanding social change in local communities. *Pitman Potter, Professor of Law; Director, Institute of Asian Research; The University of British Columbia*

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## INTRODUCTION

I was born in Kgeiwa Village, Monch Township, Montson (Guinan) County, Tsolho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Tsowon (Qinghai) Province in 1985. Monch is one of three agricultural townships in Guinan County. The Monch River flows through the lower part of the large valley where we live and then on into the Yellow River. This area is named Montson, because most Guinan residents dwell along the Monch River. 'Mon' means 'the area around Monch River' and 'ts'on' means 'county'. Even though the land is not rich or fertile, it sustains livestock and people. A steep mountain range runs along one side of the valley, resembling an angry reclining giant with many enormous caves for nostrils.

"Those were vultures' nests," Father once told me as we were harvesting canola in a field along one side of the valley. Having never seen a vulture in the outlying mountains, I wondered where they vultures were.

Later my village's best storyteller, my uncle, who would volunteer every adventure of his life on any occasion without being asked, told me that most of the vultures had been killed by Ma Bufang's<sup>1</sup> army. "The blood of vultures and other animals rushed everywhere, gouging deep ditches into the earth," Uncle said very emotionally and painfully, spraying saliva over his rapt listeners. As more and more people moved to Montson, the few remaining vultures disappeared, and later generations have never seen a vulture in this area, which was once home to many such great birds.

My village is so near the county town that villagers can conveniently visit whenever they like. Because many Han Chinese live in and around the county town, most people in my village can speak a smattering of Qinghai Chinese. A group of illiterate farmers knowing

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<sup>1</sup> Ma Bufang (1902-1973) was once chairman of the Qinghai Provincial Government. There was much bloody conflict with Tibetans in Qinghai during his rule in the 1930s and 1940s. The Communist Army arrived and defeated Ma Bufang's forces in the summer of 1948.

a language other than their mother tongue is a worrying sign, for it indicates the loss of their own language and the beginning of Sinicization. Even though I am Tibetan, because I grew up in a multi-cultural area, I never realized who I really was as a young boy. However, the village elders' endless story-telling, my parents' religious activities and love for me, learning the written Tibetan language in school, my contact with many people later in my life, and my own realizations in this world, have led me to be confident in who I am and what I am really supposed to be and do in the future.



Montson County Town (Tsering Bum 2009).

## AFTER A NIGHTMARE

**W**hen I was five years old I had a nightmare. Our home's *hyitsi* is a square, hollow sleeping platform made of red bricks and concrete. A hollow channel runs under the *hyitsi* and opens outside the house. Smoldering straw, sheep pellets and cow dung are put inside the *hyitsi* to warm it. With a thick wool quilt over me, and atop the warm *hyitsi*, I was sleeping deeply when the nightmare came. In the dream, I was sitting naked on the *hyitsi*, watching Mother stoke a fire in the adobe stove as she busily cooked noodles for us.

Suddenly, my brother appeared and enticed me with a big, red apple. "Tsebum, come down and I'll give you this apple," he called, using my nickname. I was delighted to see such an attractive apple and tried to climb down, but I couldn't move. Then, I suddenly caught sight of a soot-black cat, its eyes gleaming with ferocious hate. It was terrifying. It gazed at me as though I were its destined prey. I was sure I had no place to escape to.

"Come down, quickly!" Brother called repeatedly.

The apple was so attractive that I finally decided to climb down, no matter what. The moment I got down, however, the black cat leapt at me with a horrendous yowl. At that moment, I suddenly woke up terrified, drowning in an ocean of sweat. I called to Father, who was snoring by me. I thought my voice was loud enough to wake him, but he couldn't hear me. I called and called, but I remained firmly in the clutches of my dream. My pitiful pleas were useless. After a long struggle, I sat up on the *hyitsi*. Father and Mother woke and sat with me. I threw myself into Mother's arms.

"He's got the flu," Father said, a moment after putting his right palm to my forehead.

"What's the matter with you, my boy?" Mother asked worriedly, her voice trembling like a fragile autumn leaf in a roaring wind.

I felt so much safer held close to Mother's bosom. I didn't want to say a word, and so I just embraced her with all my might. Gradually, I fell asleep.

I was so ill the next morning that I couldn't get up. Afterwards, my nose would often suddenly begin to bleed uncontrollably. My parents took my dream as a harbinger of illness and invited monks to chant Buddhist scriptures in our home. The monks brought drums and scriptures and sat cross-legged on the *hyitsi* around a square wooden table. I lay beside them, watching. One monk drummed continually while he chanted. The other monks' upper bodies swayed back and forth to the rhythm of their chanting. Finally, upon completion of the chanting, one monk poured holy water from a dragon-decorated bowl into my palm. Father helped me sit up and made me drink half of it. I then poured the other half on my head and rubbed the water around my scalp.

Religion directs nearly every action in my community. My parents have great respect for lamas and monks. After the monks finished, Father and Mother treated them with the best food we had - milk tea, yogurt, *tsamba*,<sup>2</sup> and mutton - even though most of these foods are unavailable in our daily lives as farmers. This is especially true of mutton, which is only eaten during the Tibetan New Year period or after monks complete religious rituals.

I got better day-by-day, but nosebleeds still came at least once a week. Locals believe that black cats in dreams represent a devil or *tirun*, which manifests as a black cat. Locals say that when a person sees a black cat or dreams of one, bad luck comes to that person's family. My parents worried that something unexpected would happen and called all our relatives to my home. They then chanted Buddhist scriptures for me. Father walked around the yard, periodically pausing to burn offerings of bread, flour, *tsamba*, sugar, and liquor to our local deity.

"Ah, Yhilha!" Father called to our local deity, walking around the family altar where he had made a sacrificial fire. He sprayed liquor onto the fire and said, "My Lord! Protector of my children! Ah, Yhilha! Please protect our boy from evil!"

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<sup>2</sup> A mixture of roasted barley, cheese, butter, and hot tea. Sugar and other ingredients may be added depending on personal preference and availability.

Mother was busy doing house chores as usual. Because many people were chanting in my home, she called my oldest sister, who lived with her husband's family in my village, to help her cook. Whenever people help one another, helpers are customarily treated with the best food. Mother and Sister cooked delicious noodles with pork that Father had bought from the county town after long bargaining with the butcher. All my relatives looked tired when Mother told them to stop and have noodles. The men sat cross-legged on the *hyitsi* and were offered cigarettes by my eldest brother-in-law before eating. The women sat on the stools below the *hyitsi* by the adobe-stove. In the meantime, I was stubbornly crying in front of Mother, in order to get some money from her.

"I called at the courtyard gate, but it seems that nobody heard me," Uncle Dorjee said, suddenly appearing at the kitchen door. "Sorry to interrupt your meal."

I stopped crying and glared at the thin, old drum he carried. The drum skin had lost its original color long before, and the only color I could now discern in the dim kitchen light was an oily, shiny brown. Greedy people often mistake Dorjee's drum for a precious antique.

Father invited Uncle Dorjee to sit on the upper part of the *hyitsi*, hospitably offered him tea, and repeatedly invited him to come to our home whenever he wanted.

Everyone needed Uncle Dorjee's help sooner or later, for he was a spirit medium or *lhawa*. We all called him 'Uncle' to show respect, but we're not actually related. A local deity possesses the *lhawa* so that the deity can speak to people and help them overcome difficulties, such as disease. *Lhawa* directly communicate what a mountain deity or local deity wants to say. If the deity is thought to be Chinese, the *lhawa* speaks Chinese fluently when he is possessed.

That night after all my siblings left, Uncle Dorjee drummed and danced around the kitchen, murmuring scriptures. After a while, he was drenched in sweat and it seemed he couldn't stop moving. It was as though someone or something was controlling his body. He finally grabbed the rolling pin that hung on two long nails above the big chopping board, and approached me. He swayed like the pendulum of an old grandfather clock and sometimes struggled with the rolling pin. If he loosened his grip a bit, the rolling pin shuddered and seemed to be running away. Father made me kneel in front of

Uncle Dorjee, who gently hit my back with the rolling pin. I felt no pain. With his saliva spraying all over me, he murmured constantly, but the resulting words were little more than confused babble to my ears. A long time later, he stopped performing and lay on the *hyitsi*.

"Our local deity is now gone," Father told Mother quietly. After a long time kneeling, I stood and tiredly sat on the edge of the *hyitsi*. Mother poured a big bowl of cool tea for Uncle Dorjee, who instantly gulped it down. He was too exhausted to go home that night, so Mother prepared a silk quilt in the guestroom, and Father helped him go to bed.

When I awoke the next morning, Father and Mother were giving three tea bricks draped with a *khadag*<sup>3</sup> and some cash to Uncle Dorjee.

"It's really unnecessary," Uncle Dorjee said uncomfortably.

"My child relies on your blessings, so you must take this," said Father, forcing Uncle Dorjee to accept. He agreed to take the gifts at last, and went home escorted by Father. It is hard to say whether the monks and Uncle Dorjee's efforts were effective, but I didn't get any serious illnesses afterwards, except for some colds and less frequent nosebleeds.

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<sup>3</sup> *Khadag* are strips of white silk that are offered to visiting friends, to respected people, when soliciting favors, and to deity images in temples. The delicacy and quality of the material, their length, width, and if they have been used before or are brand new signal the degree of esteem in which the recipient of the *khadag* is held, as well as the means of the person giving the *khadag*.

## HERDING CATTLE

**S**pring's beauty is magnificent. Children herd on the village's small pasture in spring. Even children from families with no cattle thought it was great fun and came and played with the herders. We gathered our cattle together and played 'soldiers and enemies'. Some children pretended that they were bad people who always attacked good people. We used wood sticks for spears and swords, imitating Chinese TV shows we had seen. In the end, of course, the good people always won. Sometimes we concentrated on playing so much that we forgot to care for the cattle. Often, when the days were very hot, the cows ran here and there frantically to escape from the heat and we were reluctant to look for them.

My best friend, Zhabu, and I were stealing eggs from a sparrow's nest one day, when we suddenly realized that our cows had vanished. We were shocked when we eventually found them in a nearby wheat field, munching on newly sprouted crops. Fearing that the field's owner would see us, we quickly chased them out of the field. Villagers working in the field recognized us and told Aunt Lhamo, who was well known for scolding people and unfortunately, was also the owner of the damaged field.

Father sat cross-legged on the *hyitsi*, chanting scriptures and fingering his prayer beads with his right hand. Mother was milking our two cows. I squatted quietly by a corner of the adobe stove. "It has been several hours since I came back from herding. Surely, Aunt Lhamo is on her way to my home," I thought fearfully. I was sure she would rush into my home, and shout into Father's face, with her dirty saliva flying everywhere.

I was very lucky that night. I waited for Aunt Lhamo in constant agitation, but she didn't come. As usual, Father and I watched TV until midnight. I thought everything was normal, but things take time to grow to fruition, putting those who wait in agony. It also gives them some time to breathe, in order to avoid reality and forget what is about to happen. Aunt Lhamo eventually came. When I was still in bed the next morning, I awoke to a noise from outside. I

was positive it was Aunt Lhamo. Fearing she would create trouble, I was so frightened that I couldn't move a single muscle.

"Sheray, your family's cows went into my field and ate my crops," I overheard her saying gently. "I'm not asking you for compensation. I'm just saying that children should be responsible for their work and be better educated, otherwise they will be spoiled."

"Yes, yes, what you are saying is surely true," Father said respectfully. "I will teach him a lesson."

"Please Sheray, don't beat him. Instead, educate him," Aunt Lhamo said.

"If you are that kind, why are you here, Aunt Lhamo? You are very clever to use my father's hands to take revenge. Demon!" I thought angrily.

"I'm a woman, and I have many things to do," she continued. "I just came here to tell you about this. I must go now. You are our great village leader and also have many things to do. Please take better care of your son in the future," she concluded and then left.

"No." I thought, "She is not that clever, she is just afraid of the village leader, and I am the most beloved son of the village leader. Aunt Lhamo, ha, ha, ha!"

Such certitude didn't last long. The door opened in a sudden rush and Father's angry face appeared in front of my naked body. Waving a long stick, he said, "If I spare you today, then you won't know who your father is," and began beating me.

As the stick left red marks on my buttocks, I cried out for Mother and ran to her.

"Don't beat my boy, he's too young!" Mother yelled at Father angrily.

"It's you! You always protect him when he misbehaves!" Father shouted at Mother and then left.

Later, Mother helped untie the cows and sent me out herding. I rubbed my buttocks and wept all the way to the grazing area.

That day, I hit the cows hard with stones, blaming them for going into Aunt Lhamo's field. Perhaps this is human nature. We always look for someone to blame for our own mistakes. Thinking back, what had those two innocent animals done wrong?

Uncle was also herding that day. He saw me misbehaving, came to me, and began telling one of his never-ending stories while puffing on his pipe. "I am not sure why you are beating them," Uncle

said. "But one thing is sure: they are always innocent. They are our saviors; we depend on them to live. During the Cultural Revolution, the crops in the fields all belonged to the government. People were starving to death. Death could come to anyone at any moment. Gold, coral, and other treasures had no value. We sometimes saw piles of coral lying on the ground and nobody had any interest in it. Without food to purchase, what was the use of such things? Luckily, I was a goat herder for the production brigade then. Once those goats saved my life, and that's why I am now a vegetarian.

"Another herder and I were with the goats on the grazing land. We ran out of food and were about to leave for our village. Suddenly, there was a big storm and we had to stay for another five days. That was the rule of the production brigade. When it rained, the goats drank rainwater and didn't have to go for water. We stayed, carefully tending the goats. We knew our lives depended on them. However, hunger finally drove both of us mad. We couldn't bear it any more. We thought of butchering a goat and reporting that a wolf had stolen it. Certainly, we wouldn't have much trouble then. But who knew what might happen if somebody learned this and reported it to the production brigade? People were hard to understand at that time. They only cared about themselves. Some people even reported their fathers' so-called mistakes to officials in order to benefit themselves. We finally decided to drink goat milk to survive. My friend held a goat by the neck, and I started to milk, but the goat was so stubborn and wild that I couldn't manage to milk it. Then my friend knocked the goat down."

"Suck the milk from its teats,' my friend said."

"I hesitated for a bit, and then nursed like a thirsty elephant. I suckled all the milk but still felt very hungry. We caught another goat, and my friend did the same thing. Every day, we drank goat milk. Although it didn't alleviate our hunger, it was nutritious and kept us alive. We drove the goats home five days later. We had to cross a big desert on the way back and almost died. Suddenly, a brutal idea occurred to me: We could butcher two kids the production brigade didn't know about. I told my friend, and he immediately agreed.

Thinking back, our behavior was so cruel, for we killed two innocent kids, roasted them, and ate them in front of their mothers. The gate to Nirvana will never, ever open for me, Om Mani Peme Hung..."

He was breathing and chanting together as he kneaded his old prayer beads with the timeworn nails of his left hand.

"We were alive, but once our stomachs were full, we felt extremely guilty and seeing blood and pieces of goat skin here and there made us feel even guiltier.

"My dearest nephew," Uncle said, rubbing my little head with both of his hands, "When I saw you beat those innocent animals, I recalled my wrongdoing. For the sake of those animals and me, please don't do this again in the future. Always put yourself in their position. You will understand how unbearable it is if you were an animal and maltreated by others."

Uncle's kind words released compassion and sympathy in my heart. As I looked into the cows' eyes, it seemed I saw their hate-filled teardrops shimmering like thousands of sharp, doubled-edged swords. I suddenly felt very sorry for mistreating them.



Tsering Bum's family home (Tsering Bum 2009).

## BEATEN BY A LAMA

Lhedtsang Monastery is the biggest Gelugpa (the Yellow Sect of Tibetan Buddhism) monastery in my county. It is situated three kilometers from my village at the foot of the mountain range beside Monch River. It is a beautiful scene to see a monastery surrounded by villages and brimming with monks. Everyday, old people hobble to the edge of the village and gaze into the direction of Lhedtsang Monastery, fingering their prayer beads and chanting Buddhist scriptures. Occasionally, they prostrate in the direction of the monastery and chat about their past with friends.

We troublemaking village boys often listened to their conversations and then, when we got bored, we went to a small, enclosed wood near the monastery and played hide-and-seek. The county government owned the wood. As usual, there were several cows in the forest owned by rich people from the county seat. Village children were not allowed to visit the wood, because the government officials thought we would cut the trees and take them home for our families to use. We were strong and skillful, and a two-meter-high wall was little obstacle for us.

Once, while playing hide-and-seek, the watchman saw us unwittingly break some saplings. He was as fierce as a hungry dog meeting an injured hare. My friend, Zhaxi, didn't notice the watchman coming and was easily caught. The watchman then took Zhaxi into a building. We had no idea what to do, so we hid in the bushes and waited. Zhaxi appeared in front of the building after a while. He was weeping and showed us his swollen buttocks that were covered with ugly marks left by the watchman's stick. It was such a horrible sight.

"We should take revenge!" Tsebum Gyal, one of my buddies, said angrily.

"Yes! He should pay for this!" We shouted in unison.

We went near the man's building and hid in some bushes. We wore hats made from tree branches and leaves like soldiers did on television. My hate for that man was so strong that it completely

overpowered my compassion. I didn't feel there was anything wrong with what I was about to do. I felt I was Zhaxi's savior, a hero. We put stones into our slingshots and shot continually when Tsebum Gyal shouted, "Fire!" The glass windows of the man's building shattered as the stones found their target. Later, we heard the man curse us in Chinese, but he dared not come out in fear he would lose all his teeth.

Finally we were satisfied, although we decided not to go home until evening, out of concern that someone would follow us and create problems later.

We helped Zhaxi climb over the wall near the monastery and found him a place in the room of a monk from our village. Feeling very thirsty as we were leaving the monastery, I went to a spring in the middle of the pasture near the monastery and drank like a camel. Once I was satisfied, I noticed a liquor bottle in the center of the spring. I suddenly had the idea to break it with my slingshot. I shot, but the stone didn't touch the bottle. I went nearer and shot again, but the bottle lay as before. I was totally amazed and shot again and again. Later I called my friends, and we all shot at the bottle together.

"Boy in the yellow coat!" a monk called as I was collecting stones. I was wearing a yellow coat. "Come here!" the monk commanded.

"Me?" I pointed at myself and asked quietly. It was suddenly very quiet.

"Yes, you!" said the monk.

"He isn't just a monk," Tsebum Gyal whispered in my ear. "I know him. He's one of the lamas in the monastery." I was terrified to hear that and also very puzzled as to why a lama would call me.

"Why did you kill fish in the spring?" he asked.

This question puzzled me, because I had just shot at a bottle in the spring. I had never thought of killing a fish. "I didn't kill any fish. I was just shooting at a bottle in the water," I said truthfully.

"Really? Were you really not killing the fish?" he said suspiciously.

"If you don't believe me, let's go have a look," I said, my legs shaking terribly, like prayer flags in a brisk wind.

"All right, let's go," he said. I led the way, thinking that when the lama saw the bottle in the water, he would stop thinking that I was a bad boy.

Suddenly, something hard hit my head. It was terribly painful

and I felt part of my head beginning to swell up immediately. A strange sound arose in my brain, as though bees were fighting inside my head. I turned around and looked at the lama tearfully. He held a short string with a bunch of keys tied at the end. He had hit my head with them.

"Are you brave enough to kill fish again?" he asked angrily, breathing heavily.

I said nothing. I only cried out loud. When my friends saw this situation, they scattered in every direction. No one dared disobey a lama. I was very sad, because I really hadn't killed any fish. The lama had wronged and beaten me. I felt that I must have accumulated a lot of bad deeds in my last life to deserve that beating for nothing.

A distressing and miserable shadow covered my mind for a long time. Mother knew about the incident from my friend, Tsebum Gyal, and talked to me about it one night. "If you really didn't do anything wrong, you shouldn't care what other people think; lamas also make mistakes," Mother comforted.

These kind words brought me happiness. I thought, "I should really be confident about something if I am right." However, deep in my heart, I realized it was not always easy to differentiate between right and wrong, and I knew there would be fewer conflicts if people could easily distinguish right from wrong.

## ATTENDING SCHOOL

I am the youngest child in my family and, according to local custom, the youngest child should stay at home and care for their parents. The other children go to school and marry into other households. I knew nothing about school when I was very young, but I often saw children from my village happily going somewhere in groups. I wondered where they were going.

One hot autumn day, I was playing with my cousin on my family's threshing ground. My parents were sitting against a wall, hiding from the burning sun, waiting for my oldest sister and brother-in-law, who had gone in a tractor to get bundles of harvested wheat from the fields. When they brought the bundles back, they piled them very neatly at the edge of the threshing ground in piles as tall as small hills.

I saw some children holding books at the front gate of my family's threshing ground. I knew all of them, and thought they had come to play with me.

"Where are you going?" I asked Tsedan, who was among the group.

"To school," he answered proudly.

"School?" I said, finding the word unfamiliar. I wanted to know what school was. "Father," I called. "I want to go to school, too!"

"What?" Father said in a shocked voice, paused for a moment, and then said. "OK, you can go, but I'm sure you'll return soon, because the school won't accept you without payment and registration."

I went with the others to our village school, which was located near a Chinese village. When I got near, I was attracted by students playing in the schoolyard. I immediately joined them and played with them. I was fully concentrating on playing when the school bell rang, summoning all the students into the classrooms. I remained in the schoolyard. I walked slowly and quietly to a classroom window and

heard students repeating after their teacher. I imagined myself in the classroom, sitting with others, and melodiously repeating with them.

"What are you doing there?" a man shouted at me in Chinese. "Why aren't you in class! Lazy boy!" He thought I was a student. I raced back to my family's threshing ground where, with my parents beside me, I felt safe and relieved.

"See? I told you that you'd come back soon," Father said jokingly, brushing the dust off my chest that I had acquired while playing with the children. My mind was still at the school, playing and studying with the other students. I smiled and said nothing.

I was too young to do farm work. Before, I had only played with my little cousin at home, but since I had gone to school once, it became a habit to go to school often and play with others. Sometimes my parents thought I was missing and would look for me, but when they discovered I was at the school, they didn't say anything. I was sure they wanted their beloved child to have the best and the most comfortable life possible. However, if they sent me to school, their own lives would be very difficult in the future. One night after finishing a day's work, all my family members discussed my future.

"I think it's better to send him to school," Father said, still panting from a day of heavy work.

"Yes, I agree," my oldest brother-in-law declared, holding a cigarette between his fingers. "He's too young to do much work. Besides, he gets nosebleeds when he does heavy work. He can learn something in school, and it may help him in the future."

"You're right," Father said. "He can stay in school for a while, then when he's strong enough, he can quit school and stay at home." My mother and sister also agreed and so they decided to send me to school the very next day.

Thus I became a formal student. Each school day, I attended school and returned home with a group of children. The headmaster, the one who had shouted at me in Chinese, thought I was too old to be in the first grade, so he put me in the second grade. I knew nothing of basic reading and writing and had an extremely difficult time, but gradually, fearing the teachers' beatings, I worked hard and had made much progress after one semester.

During holidays, I stayed at home, cared for the cows, and helped Mother do house work. Occasionally, I had nightmares about teachers beating me at school.

"Lazy boy! Stretch out your hand! I'll teach you a lesson; otherwise, you won't know what you are studying for!" a stern, angry-faced teacher bellowed.

"I beg you teacher!" I would say, "I'll study hard in the future."

"Stretch out your hand...!"

It was such a relief to find this was only a bad dream.



Display of deities in Tsering Bum's family shrine (Tsering Bum 2009).

## KALACHAKRA

I can not remember the time precisely; I think it was when I was ten or eleven that a Kalachakra was held by the Sixth Gongtang Rinpoche in Sunched County, Ganlho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province. Attending a Kalachakra meant great fortune to Tibetans in my home place. Everybody wanted to meet the lama and receive his blessings.

Ganlho was very far from my home, so we hired a truck. At least two people from each family were in the truck. Father, Mother, and I also went to Ganlho with other villagers. The truck was very big, and more than fifty people were in it, plus each family's tent, cooking pot, salted pork, wheat flour, and canola oil. There was just enough space left for us to breathe. We all sat in the truck. People talked to each other, slept when the road was flat, and enjoyed the scenery when they saw something new. For me, everything was fresh and unexpected. I had never seen so many people squashed together in a truck before, so many places that were so different from my home, and never seen people other than those from my own county. I stood in the truck and glanced around curiously, counting the marmots, rabbits, eagles, foxes, wolves, and other animals that I saw along the road. Every time I pointed my right index finger at the animals and counted them, Mother said, "Sit down, naughty boy!" fearing I would tumble out of the truck.

"Mother, how long will it take us to reach Sunched?" I asked, sitting in front of her.

"It will take two days," Mother said.

"Then how can we eat? I'm hungry!" I said.

"Don't worry." Mother said kindly. "We'll stop at restaurants on the way."

"Oh," I said. "But will we also sleep in the truck at night?"

"Of course not," Mother said. "We'll stop at night and find hotels."

I was getting hungrier and hungrier as the truck raced like the wind. Mother handed me an apple given by an old lady sitting beside

her. I ate it, which killed my hunger for a bit. As the truck started down a bumpy, zigzagging road, I felt like vomiting and lost my hunger completely. I cried to Mother and Father that I wanted to get off the truck and rest, but both replied that we had to go quickly if we were to find a hotel before midnight.

"Use this to vomit in," said Uncle, handing me a plastic bag. Mother held it below my face and I vomited into it. After I vomited everything that was in my stomach, Mother threw the bag out of the truck. When I felt a little better, we were already in a county town, stopping for something to eat. I realized that I had missed many interesting animals and much beautiful scenery while I was vomiting. Usually, my curiosity drove me to ask others such questions as, "What is the name of this place?" "Who are the people living here?" But now, I felt dizzy and abnormal and lacked interest in learning anything new.

Beggars had congregated in the place where we stopped. It seemed beggars from all over the world had agreed to meet here. People were kinder than usual and all had small amounts of cash ready. I saw people giving one *jiao* or two *jiao* to beggars when we entered a Muslim restaurant. Everybody ordered a bowl of noodles, and Father ordered a small bowl for me.

"Father," I said, "I'm still feeling uncomfortable. I can't eat anything."

"Come on boy, you've got to eat something, otherwise you'll be very sick," Father said, putting the noodles in front of me.

The sight and smell of the noodles made me want to vomit again. I turned around and looked at the busy street filled with pilgrims going to Sunched.

"Father, who are the people prostrating on the street?" I asked.

"They are pilgrims, too," Father said. "They're prostrating from their homes all the way to Sunched."

"That's unbelievable!" I exclaimed.

"You think that's incredible!" Uncle said in astonishment. "Then what about the people who prostrate to Lhasa? Compared to them, these people outside are nothing!"

I then recalled that the oldest man in my village, who was eighty-five years old, had gone to Lhasa on foot when he was young. He had seen many people prostrating and a few dead people lying along the way.

"Anyway, I can't do that," I said to Uncle.

"Of course you can't," Father said laughing. "Look at you! You're as skinny as a dried tree. Quickly eat your noodles. We've got to go."

"Father! I really can't!" I begged.

"We can buy some biscuits for him," said Mother. "He can eat them when he gets hungry in the truck."

Everyone nodded their heads in agreement with Mother. They were all full. No one wanted my bowl of noodles, so I offered it to a beggar who was missing his right hand and sitting in front of the restaurant, waiting for someone to show compassion. As I handed him the bowl, he looked at me with grateful eyes and chanted "*Om Mani Peme Hung...*" For the first time in my life I felt that doing good things meant happiness. We got back in the truck and continued our journey. Thanks to the Three Jewels<sup>4</sup> I didn't become sick again.

We reached Sunched County in the afternoon of the second day. The place where the Kalachakra was to be held was near Lhadrun Drashiched Monastery.

"Aren't we going to visit?" I asked Father as our truck passed the monastery.

"Yes, but not now," Father said.

"Why? When will we visit?" I asked.

"We have seen many pilgrims on the way here," said Father. "Everybody is afraid that there won't be enough good places left to pitch our tents. We will leave early and visit the monastery on the way back."

"Oh," I said, nodding in comprehension.

We reached the Kalachakra site a while later. The scene exceeded my wildest dreams. Thousands of white tents dotted the grassland and valleys. It was really amazing! I never imagined there were that many people and tents in the world. My villagers pitched tents together by a river, which made it convenient to cook. However, it was a bit far from where the Rinpoche was camped, so the next day we had to walk a long way to get there.

After we had bread and tea the next morning, Mother put some bread that she had baked early that morning into my schoolbag.

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<sup>4</sup> The Buddha, Buddhist teachings and community of Buddhist practitioners. Tibetans use this term when they want to stress what they are saying is true.

"We won't be able to come back for lunch, so we have to take bread with us," Mother said.

We walked with the crowd, and Father held my hand, never letting go, because he and Mother were afraid I would get lost among all the people. After an hour's walk, we came to where many people sat, chanting scriptures and praying for the Rinpoche. I looked at the hills beyond and they too were covered by devout pilgrims. I could hardly see even a dot of green. Loud speakers were hung on wooden poles, and wires led to the Rinpoche's tent. We found an empty space, removed our shoes and hats, and sat cross-legged. Father and Mother put their palms together and chanted.

The Rinpoche taught that we should not steal, kill, or cheat, interspersed with many tales and stories. A while later, people from behind and in front of us threw *khadag* toward the Rinpoche's tent. Father also took out three *khadag* from the bosom of his robe and folded some cash into each one. Having a *khadag* in each of our hands, Mother, Father, and I piously threw them in front of us. I was very excited to collect the *khadag* and money tossed from behind us and throw them to the front. In turn, those in front of us tossed these offerings even further forward until the monks collected them and took them into the Rinpoche's tent. Some rich people were tossing hundreds of *yuan* to the front. I didn't see anyone take the money and put it in their pockets. For devout pilgrims, money was nothing but paper on this occasion. The only thing they wanted was the Rinpoche's precious teaching.

I lacked experience and didn't appreciate how difficult life really is. I couldn't understand parts of the deep, meaningful teachings. Sitting on the grassland and listening to the loudspeakers was boring. Even though Father and Mother slapped my bare head lightly when I didn't concentrate on the teachings, I squirmed and looked around, hoping to find some boys to play with. But the result was disappointing, for every child was strictly controlled by their parents. Knowing I would have to entertain myself, I unclasped the metal necklace given by my third sister and tied it around my bare feet.

"Stupid boy!" Mother screeched. "Don't do such inauspicious things at this moment." I quickly untied my feet.

"Look at you!" Father added, "That's why you're so skinny and often have nosebleeds."

"Sit still and listen!" Mother commanded, forcing me to sit between Father and her.

I sat between them like a trapped animal and listened. I didn't know why I was not permitted to play. Later, Mother told me that I wouldn't receive the Rinpoche's blessings if I didn't concentrate.

On the first day of the Kalachakra, we walked a long way, searching for our tent. It seemed we were lost in an endless tent ocean.

"Many new tents have been pitched here today," Father commented tiredly.

I held Mother's hand as we walked among the tents. Finally, almost at dusk, we found ours. Father tied a red scarf atop it and said that we would not get lost with this scarf in place.

The nights at the Kalachakra site were unbearable. It was extremely difficult to fall asleep because of people's names being shouted all night long: "Dorjee..." "Tsebu..." "Norbum..." ... These calls were filled with deep sadness.

"Father, what has happened?" I asked at midnight.

"They have lost their children," Father said sleepily. "Children get lost very easily during these occasions. You should be careful, too."

"Will they find their children?" I asked.

"I think so," Father answered.

Mother added, "People send lost children to the Rinpoche's place when they see them, and their parents will get them there tomorrow."

"Parents are still parents," Father said. "They are always very worried about their children, and they won't stop worrying until they know that their children are really safe."

I said nothing, knowing my parents would become mad if I got lost, and resolved to hold both my parents' hands the next day.

The Kalachakra lasted more than ten days. Every afternoon, people lined up in front of the Rinpoche's tent to receive his blessing. Realizing it was impossible to meet the Rinpoche during this busy time, people from my village waited till the last day. To our surprise, there were still many people waiting. We lined up with the others. Guards, with plastic batons in their hands, rode horses around us, to maintain discipline. Eventually, as our turn came to enter the Rinpoche's tent, Father held me in front of him, protecting me from

the rushing crowd. I felt a little nervous, but the moment I saw the Rinpoche's compassionate face, I became very calm and relaxed. The Rinpoche touched everyone's head lightly and gave everyone a red thread he had blessed which, once outside his tent, people tied around their necks.

After seeing the Rinpoche, everyone from my village prepared to leave. I thought we were leaving for home directly and was very happy. When we stopped at Lhadrun Drashiched Monastery, I quickly showed an expression of unhappiness.

"Look at you!" Father said. "You are so young, but already you have had the chance to visit Lhadrun Drashiched. You don't realize how lucky you are!"

I didn't appreciate Father's words at that time, but I later realized I was really lucky to see Gongtang Rinpoche and Lhadrun Drashiched Monastery. I wonder if my descendants will have a chance to visit monasteries and lamas.

After three days at the monastery doing prostrations and circumambulations, we started our journey homeward. As usual, I enjoyed counting animals and seeing the scenery along the way and this time I didn't vomit.



Yhilha, Montson County seat Temple (Tsering Bum 2009).

## THE *LHATZI*

People from my village are all Buddhists. We also worship mountain deities.

"Help me cut down a small tree," Father said one summer day.

"For what?" I asked curiously.

"We will renew the *lhatzi* tomorrow," he said. "We need to make a big arrow and take it to the ceremony." I was delighted to hear such exciting, unexpected news.

The ceremony was held once a year. Father had never taken me, but had decided to take me this year, which signified I was growing up and would participate in more religious activities in the future. Father and I cut down a small tree and took the bark off it. Father whittled and smoothed the tree, sharpening one end meticulously. He also made three fletchings with some flat wood, dyed them the color of eagle feathers, and tied them to the other end of the arrow. It looked exactly like a huge arrow. I imagined if a man were big enough and there was a bow perfectly suited for the arrow, it could shoot the sun out of the sky.

I was so excited that I couldn't sleep. I waited for dawn to appear, but it was such a long time to wait - much longer than usual. I fell asleep at last and dreamt of carrying the arrow to the *lhatzi*. Every child in my village looked at me admiringly. I walked in front of them, proudly marching, paying no attention to their calls.

"Get up, boy," Mother said, shaking my arm. "It's late morning. Come eat breakfast." I suddenly realized that today I would go to the *lhatzi* with Father and jumped into my clothes.

"See? Today he is unusually alert," Father observed to Mother laughingly, as I sat by the adobe-stove, sipping a cup of milk tea.

Father and I wore our best Tibetan robes. The ceremony would take almost one day, so Mother prepared lunch and put it in a fabric bag for us. In contrast to my dream, I couldn't carry the arrow. It was so heavy that Father put it on the back of my brother-in-law's tractor, and then we went to the *lhatzi* together.

The *lhatzi* was located on a big, high plain. To get there, we had to drive past the county seat on lots of twisting, bumpy roads. After we finally reached the *lhatzi*, we saw motorcycles and tractors everywhere. Everybody was wearing Tibetan robes. This was surprising, because modernization had long ago brought modern clothes to my home area, and most people usually wore Western style clothes.

Monks from Lhedtsang Monastery directed the ritual. Their arrow was made from a big metal pipe and was the best of all. They chanted scriptures for several hours. The attendants repeated their chants and fingered their prayer beads. I found it quite boring. The only thing I could do was to look at all the different people curiously and study their behavior.

"*Gwei!*" all the men shouted together suddenly, which signaled the completion of the chanting. The monks removed bags from a jeep and tossed the candies they held into the sky. People rushed over and started picking them up. The candies were from the monks' hands and thus auspicious, and would bring good luck in the future.

Among the energetic nomads and farmers, I was like a pitiful mouse running for its life under the feet of thousands of wild yaks. I sought candies with all my might, but only managed to get two. I was absolutely satisfied until I saw older people with many candies in their hands, and then I realized I was a loser. The men wrapped the candies in fabric and papers and put them in their pockets and robe pouches. Later, they would put them in front of the Buddha images in their family shrines, to be replaced only after the next ceremony.

"Keep these candies for yourself, boy," Father said. Seeing the desperate expression on my face, he gave me the ones he had collected.

"Thank you Father! I will give these to Mother and let her put them in the family shrine," I said joyfully. This illustrates parents' generosity. Whenever their children are unhappy, they give what they have to make lives for their beloved ones more comfortable.

The monks ordered the nomads and farmers to put the new arrows among the old ones that had been put up in previous years. Several skillful men climbed into the *lhatzi* and then other men handed them the metal arrow the monks had brought, which they positioned in the center of the others. It was extremely beautiful,

especially when the sun shone on it, sending forth glimmering rays. People were very eager to look at it, no matter what happened to their eyes. Later, the men passed arrows brought by locals to the men on the *lhatzi*. They erected each arrow carefully, never letting other arrows go higher than the monastery's arrow.

"No arrows should be put higher than the one brought by the monks. That is the rule, and everyone is glad that monasteries have priority," Father said when I suggested we put our family's arrow higher than the others.

"See? The *lhatzi* is getting bigger each year. It is for our mountain god. If he is happy, he brings good fortune," Father explained.

After all the arrows had been put up, the nomads brought ropes made from sheep's wool. Helped by the farmers, they bound the *lhatzi* very tightly. They did it yearly, and as a result, the *lhatzi* stood firm. It seemed it would stand for thousands of years if nobody harmed it.

People burnt a large pile of offerings on the altar in front of the *lhatzi* and prostrated as firecrackers were set off. Fearing I would lose Father among the crowd, I held his hand tightly and circumambulated the *lhatzi* and the altar clockwise. Everyone chanted and threw *longdha*<sup>5</sup> into the sky together. I noticed people putting bullets, daggers, and other weapons as well as money and other precious things into the *lhatzi*.

"Why are they doing that, Father?" I asked.

"Putting money and precious things into the *lhatzi* means they respect the mountain god and hope to obtain good luck from him," Father explained. "Putting weapons into the *lhatzi* means they will not join conflicts in the future. They hope to have peace." I then understood that our action was not superstitious, for maybe it would help to prevent misbehavior in the future.

Father, Brother-in-law, and I ate the lunch we had brought, and others did the same. After resting for a while, the monks and the locals started chanting again. It took several hours. I went to sleep in Father's arms only to be awakened by loud shouting as the men started circumambulating the *lhatzi* again. Finally, everyone got into

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<sup>5</sup> A small, square paper printed with Buddhist scriptures and such symbols as tigers, phoenixes, lions, and dragons.

tractor-trailers and onto their motorcycles, ready to leave. Some men who had walked to the *lhatzi* and were from my village got into Brother-in-law's tractor-trailer. There were other tractors from my village too. In a line, we drove through the county town, shouting and cheering along the way. Some people at the county seat were surprised and looked at us with their mouths agape. Others were used to it and pretended not to see or hear anything.



A typical Kgeiwa Village family courtyard gate (Tsering Bum 2009).

## GUARDING IRRIGATION WATER

**M**y village is surrounded by fields where we cultivate wheat, barley, potatoes, beans, and canola. These crops look different from each other and, seen at a distance, the village fields resemble a chessboard.

We irrigate the fields after the crops have sprouted. Since the water in the ditches is not enough for all the villages at the same time, the government makes an irrigation schedule. Village watchmen stay along the ditches to ensure that other villages do not divert the water from our fields. Sometimes, when it is my village's turn to irrigate, people from other villages make small ditches secretly to water their own fields.

As a boy, it is very challenging to irrigate the fields, for it requires great energy and courage. There is no difference between day and night during irrigation time. We work constantly.

Father sent me to guard the water one summer. Several other young men went with me. We loaded tents, mattresses, quilts, firewood, and food into a tractor-trailer and chugged off. We shouted wildly as though we were going to a party at which we would be the guests of honor. I watched in amazement, thinking they were the happiest people in the world.

"All right, men!" one man announced as we neared a Chinese village. "It's time for us to draw lots and decide who should stay where."

"Let's do it," another man said. "Tsering Bum is too young to stay alone. One of us must take care of him."

Suddenly, everybody shouted that they would like to take care of me. I was surprised but kept quiet.

"Let Tsering Bum choose," shouted Older Brother Dundrub, who was my neighbor.

"Yes... that's a good idea!" the others shouted.

"I want to stay with Older Brother Dundrub," I said timidly.

"Aha, Dundrub, you're so lucky!" the others shouted, laughing.

Dundrub and I were destined to stay at the edge of a Tibetan village. We pitched our tent just by the irrigation ditch. The tent was very white among the green surroundings of the summer season. Realizing we were there to guard our water supply, local villagers were very disappointed, because they then wouldn't have a chance to steal water for the three days during which my village had the water rights.

I boiled a kettle of tea and then Dundrub and I had bread that Mother had made particularly for my trip.

"Come with me along the ditch and make sure nobody steals the water," Dundrub said, slinging his coat over his right shoulder, pretending to be cool.

As we walked along the ditches, Dundrub sang love songs. Finally, we reached the foot of a hill covered with green grass and many colorful flowers. Seeing butterflies flitting about, Dundrub walked to the hilltop and looked around. I followed. Dundrub picked up a yellow flower and was so deeply inspired that he seemed to be transported to another world. He put his right palm to his right cheek and started singing. I was quite young and only remember his melodious voice and not the lyrics. Dundrub stopped after signing a part to enjoy the fresh air of the green summer. Beyond, in a golden canola field, a girl sang back. The air was full of the sound of her tinkling voice and the musical sounds of thousands of bees maneuvering among the canola flowers.

"Go to the tent and stay," Older Brother Dundrub said after the girl sang back.

"But..." I sputtered.

"Keep a candle lit all night so people will think we are there and then they won't dare steal the water," he said, interrupting me, and then quickly walked away. I gazed at his back until he disappeared in the trees. I suddenly felt scared and missed my parents. I walked to the tent as quickly as possible, because I realized one of the greatest fears of my young life was approaching - darkness.

I lit a candle as Older Brother Dundrub had instructed and went to bed early, wrapping myself in the wool quilt. I felt terribly hot, but I didn't dare move the quilt away because I was paralyzed by my fear of darkness. I was even afraid of breathing deeply in the tent.

Ghostly images appeared when I opened my eyes and looked around. I couldn't move or scream.

I only half-slept. When the first rays of dawn penetrated the tent, I grew braver and sat up. The day became clearer. I started crying, and I cried and cried and cried.

Older Brother Dundrub suddenly appeared and asked curiously, "What's the matter with you, boy?"

I cried more loudly when I saw him. Dundrub was puzzled. He finally handed me some candies to comfort me. Later, he told me that the girl he had spent the night with had given them to him. He also promised that he wouldn't leave me alone again. When I stopped wailing, Older Brother Dundrub lay on the quilt drowsily and ordered me to walk along the ditch every two hours. I then realized why the men had vied with each other to have me stay with them. They could order me to do anything they wanted, for it was disrespectful for young people to disobey older ones.

I followed Dundrub's instructions and inspected the ditch every two hours. To my surprise, I discovered a man digging a small ditch to his wheat field.

"Stop!" I said in a quivering voice. "It's not your village's turn to irrigate. It's illegal to do it."

"Boy," he said laughing, "pretend you've seen nothing, and nothing will happen to you."

I then ran back and reported what I had seen to Older Brother Dundrub.

"Shit-eater!" he bellowed. "I'll teach him how to be a man, otherwise he won't know how to behave." Older Brother Dundrub picked up his shovel and rushed away as I ran after him. He walked with big, long strides, and I was unable to keep up. When we got to the man's field, I looked around. Realizing the man was nowhere to be seen, I was relieved. Conflicts over irrigation water are common. Every year families fight over water, and people are killed or seriously injured for stealing water when it's not their turn.

Older Brother Dundrub cursed when he saw the man's field full of water. It is very disrespectful when someone says "*Awa ama*." It means "damn your father and mother." Having no idea where the man was, Older Brother Dundrub became enraged. His eyes glistened with fiery anger. He looked around fiercely and then walked over to a small, nearly-fallen wall by the water thief's wheat field where he

proceeded to dig away the earth until the wall was about to collapse. He then pushed the wall into the wheat field with all his strength. "Pa!" the wall fell, burying all the wheat under it.

"Haha!" Older Brother Dundrub exclaimed happily. "This is retribution for stealing my village's water."

"Older Brother Dundrub, I'm afraid. Shall we run?" I said. I was very nervous after seeing what he had done.

"What are you afraid of? Why should we run?" he asked curiously, which made me shut up.

"Well, let's go relax in our tent. Nothing will happen to you while I'm here," Dundrub boasted, thrusting out his chest, and pointing his thumb at himself.

I kept quiet, for I was still agitated. Dundrub put his shovel on his right shoulder, hummed a Chinese melody, and walked toward our tent. I followed.

Older Brother Dundrub hadn't slept at all that frightening night. While I played outside with a pika that I had caught in a trap, he was inside, emanating snores powerful enough to trouble nearby ants.

Each day we searched along the ditch, but we didn't discover anybody else trying to steal our water. Then the time came for us to leave. People from another village were already there to replace us. As per our earlier decision, our tractor would come along the ditch and collect us. We packed up what we had brought and waited. "Tsering Bum," Older Brother Dundrub said.

"Yes?" I answered.

"Don't mention the man stealing water to anyone, otherwise we'll get into trouble," he said.

"I won't," I assured.

"Don't tell your father about this as he is our village leader," added Older Brother Dundrub, interrupting what I was about to say.

"I won't tell anyone, I'll do what you say," I confirmed

"Good boy!" he said happily, rubbing my head with his rough hand.

"Ta ta ta..." the moment I heard the tractor, my heart leapt quickly. I suddenly missed home very much and was delighted by the engine's sound.

The tractor smoke filled the blue sky and gradually materialized in front of us. As usual, the men in the tractor-trailer

were shouting feverishly. Older Brother Dundrub and I waved and shouted back. We were finally going home.



Irrigation canal in Kgeiwa Village (Tsering Bum 2009).

## THE FIGHT

Father, I don't want to go to school. Please let me stay at home," I pleaded. I was a student in the County Town Primary School. Attending school was true suffering, particularly when I couldn't catch up with other students.

I had learned only Tibetan and math for three years in our village school. I then attended the County Tibetan Primary School where the Chinese language teacher often beat me for not passing the Chinese exams. She beat me not because she cared about me, but because if I didn't pass, the County Education Bureau would fine her. I did my best to learn Chinese, but how could I catch up with the students who had studied Chinese for more than three years?

"Why? Why is that?" Father asked.

"I can't catch up with the others. Besides, students in the County Tibetan Primary School are just like Chinese people. I don't like them," I said.

It was definitely true that when they wrote an essay in Tibetan, it seemed to be composed by an alien who was just starting to learn Tibetan. These students had totally lost touch with their roots.

"That's not a good reason. You should study hard and get along well with your classmates," Father urged

"No, I can't bear it," I protested, tears filling my eyes.

"You can't bear what?" Father asked.

"The teachers beat me for not doing well in class," I said.

"But that isn't the teachers' fault. It's because you don't study hard," Father admonished.

"If the teachers beat him, then let him stay at home. It's better," Mother said.

Mother had never attended school. She is hardworking and very compassionate. She couldn't bear hearing about her son being beaten.

"Well, anyway, he is not going to attend school forever. Let him stay at home and farm. He should learn to do heavy work from now on," Father concluded.

I stayed at home and worked for a year. I didn't want to return to school. In contrast, working with family members and the villagers was great fun. However, I was not fated to be a farmer, for it was my destiny to go to school.

"Sheray, your son hasn't finished the nine years of compulsory education. As village leader, you should be the first to send your child back to school," the village school headmaster pointed out to Father.

"Yes, yes, you're right, but I don't understand why the policy of nine years of compulsory education is sometimes very strict and sometimes very lax. Isn't it a set law?" Father said.

"It is a fixed, good policy, but it's hard to enforce in Tibetan areas," the headmaster explained.

"All right, I'll send my son back to school," Father agreed.

Hearing that made me think of my cruel teachers, and long-forgotten fears. Sadness filled my heart again. Nevertheless, a few days later, I was back in the village school. Seeing younger students made me feel very old. I couldn't imagine how to survive among village children who always called me 'Big Brother'. I sat among the trees in a corner of the schoolyard, thinking that if I studied hard then I could be a top student and beg Father to send me to the County Tibetan Primary School where there were many students older than me.

"Come on Big Brother, there's a fight," a student called.

"What's that got to do with me? Who cares?" I thought, but then I heard men shouting exactly the way village men shouted when they are angry. I stood up hurriedly and ran to the school gate.

"Get back! Get back inside!" the school headmaster screeched at the students who were outside. I was unaware of what was going on. Everybody was very agitated. The headmaster chased us back into the schoolyard. I peered in the direction many other students were looking and saw all my village men fighting with men wearing white hats. They were throwing stones at each other hatefully. Some men were even using swords, trying to kill one another.

"You hear me? Go back immediately!" the school headmaster bellowed.

We hurried into the schoolyard, fearing the headmaster would beat us. We all wondered what was the matter. All we could do was wait. We soon heard police car sirens, but shouting and other violent sounds continued. Several hours later, we could hear only sirens. We

waited for classes to end and then went home to learn what had happened.

Mother was the only one I saw when I got home. "Mother, what's the matter? Why are you crying?" I asked, astonished at her endless sobs. "Lama was hit on the head with a stone," Mother said, still crying, "and now he's having an operation in the hospital."

Lama was my oldest brother-in-law.

Later, when Mother was more composed, she told me that more than six tractor-trailers of ethnic Hui people had come to my village with swords and spears and had fought our village men. Luckily, no one was killed, but people from both sides had been seriously injured, including Lama.

"Mother!" I asked, almost in tears, "Why did this happen?"

"I don't know. This morning most villagers were at a meeting in the village temple. During the meeting, your cousin came into the temple unexpectedly. 'When I was going to water the cows,' your cousin said, panting, 'I met many Hui people. One pointed his sword at me and asked where Brother Dundrub Gyal was. I was terribly frightened, but I only said that I didn't know and that he was not from our village. Then they allowed me to go,'" Mother reported.

"Well, what a surprise! Why are they looking for Dundrub Gyal?" your father said."

"Who knows? Let's just go and fight them..." the men shouted together. 'Those Hui people deserve a lesson.'"

"I think a fight is unavoidable," your father said. 'Men! Go to your homes secretly. Come with weapons. We'll take them by surprise with an ambush.'"

"Yes... that's the wisest method to win this fight!" the men shouted."

"All right," your father directed. 'Men go quickly. Women, collect stones in front of the temple.'"

"Everybody did as your father ordered. The men came back with their weapons. Led by some brave young men, they attacked the Hui people, who retreated, and then threw stones at our village men. Our village returned the volley. The police came but couldn't do anything. Finally the Hui people scattered. People from both sides were seriously injured. Your brother-in-law was one of them. That's all I know."

Hatred towards those people rose in my heart. In my mind I suddenly pictured Brother-in-law suffering in the hospital.

Mother was preparing food for my oldest sister and Father, who were in the hospital caring for Brother-in-law. Mother said that she and I would go to the hospital together to see him. Although Mother didn't cry aloud afterwards, her tears didn't stop flowing all that day.

"Mother, you must stay home. I'll take the food to Father and Sister," I said, in fear Mother would become ill when she saw Brother-in-law suffering.

"OK, I still have chores to do. I'll come to the hospital tonight after finishing all my work," Mother said

I met some villagers chatting about the event on the way to the hospital.

"Last year, a person from that Hui village came to our village to see the archery contest, and Dundrub Gyal beat him for no reason, so they came to our village to take revenge. The police caught their village leader and some other important people, and they also imprisoned Dundrub Gyal," one man said.

Dundrub Gyal was one of my relatives, a good fighter, who liked brawling, and many in my village thought he was a hero and respected him.

After seeing what had happened in my village, I became more aware of the importance of education. I thought it was the only way to eradicate such ideas. The world has changed, and people should compete with each other over how much they know and not in how well they can fight.

Brother-in-law stayed in the hospital for more than three months. During that time, my family members regularly visited the hospital. When Mother and my oldest sister went to the hospital, they always cried a lot. Father didn't let them stay very long, because Brother-in-law would scream painfully sometimes, making Mother and my oldest sister heartbroken. As a result of the local government's negotiation, the Hui village paid all of Brother-in-law's medical expenses, and my village paid the medical expenses of the injured people in the Hui village. Several months later, the prisoners were released. The County Government ordered the Hui village leader and some others to go to the hospital to apologize. Although

we never learned who struck Brother-in-law's head, this incident was thus settled, at least on the surface.



Kgeiwa Village lane (Tsering Bum 2009).

## HERDING

**T**sering Bum, would you like to go herding with me?" Older Brother-in-law asked one summer evening during my holiday from school. Older Brother-in-law had gone to the county town to purchase vegetables to take with him to the herding place. It was too late to go home by the time he finished shopping, so he came to my home for the night.

"Really? Can I go? When?" I said, delighted to hear I could go with him. I asked many questions without waiting for replies.

"If you want, then you can go. It's a good chance for you to learn a lot," Father said.

"Ha..." Brother-in-law laughed. "I thought you wouldn't go. I was joking, but if you really want to come, prepare well. We'll leave the day after tomorrow."

"Yes, Brother-in-law," I said.

"But remember," Mother cautioned, "don't think it's like traveling. Be brave! It will be difficult!"

According to Mother's instruction, the next day I prepared fried bread, dried pork, water, thick woolen underwear, my family's traditional long sword, and my fleece-lined Tibetan robe.

"Though it's summer, it's still cold in the herding place," Mother advised.

I was terribly excited and couldn't sleep the evening before I left. Picturing the beautiful herding landscape put me in an imaginary world. After some dozing, Mother called my name outside the window of my room. I was delighted to be awakened.

At breakfast, Brother handed me a harmonica. "You can play it when you are bored," he said while chewing a mouthful of *tsamba*. "Or you can frighten the wolves by playing tremendous music, ha!" Brother joked.

I thanked Brother and recalled another present he had given me several years ago. It was also a harmonica.

Father had to attend many meetings in the county town and other places. To make it more convenient, the Village Committee

bought a bicycle for him. It was a rainy day when the bicycle came to my home. Having a bicycle in our home delighted me. As Father and Mother watched television, I pushed the bicycle out of the courtyard secretly and tried to ride around the village, despite the rain. Many friends saw me and surrounded me.

"Tsering Bum," my friend Tsedan said, "your new bicycle is perfect! Can I have a ride?"

"Of course you can, my friend," I said.

"Thanks very much!" he said and peddled away.

"The Village Committee bought this for my father," I announced proudly without being asked.

"Can I have a ride?" "Can I...?" came request after request.

"All right," I said. "You can all have a ride, from oldest to youngest."

They all rode the bicycle crazily in the rain, competitively showing off. Unfortunately, as Zhabu was riding in the rainwater, spraying water on either side, the back tire of the bicycle slid, and he fell into the water. "Are you injured?" We all ran over and asked,

"Luckily, I'm OK," he said.

Zhabu was really fortunate. It had been horrible to see him fall, but he had not been injured.

"But," said Tsedan, "I think the bicycle is broken."

I was astonished to see the bicycle's twisted back wheel. I didn't dare tell Father. With my friends' help, I put the bicycle back in my family's courtyard secretly. I was afraid of seeing Father. At that moment, I made a big decision. I made Tsedan promise to not tell Father, and I fled to my second brother-in-law's home in a neighboring village. On the way to his home, the rain got heavier and heavier, but I didn't feel cold, I only felt afraid.

After telling my older sister and her husband that I had come for a visit, I dried my clothes in front of the adobe stove. They believed my lies and I stayed in Sister's home for two days. During that time I heard nothing about Father and the bicycle. Gradually, I began to feel homesick and thought, "I'd rather Father beat me than stay here without a real home."

Brother came to pick me up two days later. "Go with your brother," Sister said, "otherwise Mother will miss you, and I'm sure Father won't beat you."

"Sister? Why do you say that? What do you know?" I asked curiously.

"The day after you came," Sister said, smiling, "I went to the county town to buy matches. I met Father and Tsedan's father. They were there with a broken bike. A repairman was fixing it. Father told me everything."

"Sister, why did you pretend...?" I said in embarrassment, pretending to be upset.

"Father told me to let you stay here as long as you like. He said it's a lesson for you," Sister explained.

Brother said, "See this?"

"Wow! A harmonica! Is this for me?" I asked in surprise.

"Yes, if you come home with me," he said.

"I'll surely go with you if you give me the harmonica and promise you won't take it back later," I said.

Brother handed it to me and swore that he would not take it back. This was the first harmonica I got from Brother...

As we prepared for our herding adventure, we put some articles into the tractor-trailer. Oldest Brother-in-law then took me to his home to get some pack animals and his family's 200 sheep. We soon set off. We had to cross a steep slope behind Lhedtsang Monastery to reach the herding place. The 200 sheep followed several rams, which always led the way. We followed behind. "You can hold the mule's tail if you're tired," Brother-in-law said.

Even though I was extremely tired, I was afraid the mule would kick me, so I said, "No, I'm not tired." When we reached the top of the slope, I had to stick out my tongue to breathe. My sweat glued my underwear to my body, making me terribly uncomfortable. From the slope top, I saw a limitless desert before me and wondered what the sheep could find to eat.

"See? If you look carefully, you can see something green on the other side of the desert. That's our grazing land," Brother-in-law said.

I could see only desert. After resting, we started off again. The sand under my shoe soles was so hot it scorched my feet.

There was no water at the grazing site. The two pack animals, the mule and a donkey, could each carry only a small amount of water with our other gear. I was very thirsty as we walked in the desert, but fearing that the water was not enough, I drank only a little.

"Brother-in-law, are we on the right track?" I asked, somewhat confused, because there was nothing that resembled a path.

"I think so," he said. "Don't worry about it. We'll just follow the sheep. They know the way better than we do."

"Do they really know?" I asked in disbelief.

"Of course, because they're familiar with this route," he said.

We reached our destination in the afternoon. The sheep had eaten nothing in the desert, and it was now very hot. They took refuge under bunches of tall grass, avoiding the scorching sun. Brother-in-law and I rested in our white conical tent.

"Get up," Brother-in-law called some time later. I was so tired that I had forgotten the sheep. "It will be dark soon. We must herd the sheep back."

As I stood in front of the tent, I felt the temperature falling. The sheep were eating grass vigorously.

"Brother-in-law, are they full?" I asked while we were bringing the sheep back.

"No, not yet," Brother-in-law said. "But if it is too late, wolves will attack our flock."

"Wolves?" I cried.

There was no formal enclosure for our sheep. When darkness arrived, the sheep clustered around our tent and slept.

We had a simple dinner. In our small pot on the adobe stove, we boiled a hare that we had killed as it slept in the grass.

"Are you full?" Brother-in-law asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"Then follow me," he said. I followed him outside. We climbed a small hill together and rested. Looking down, we saw our tent in the middle of a valley where black sheep dung covered the green grass.

"*Gwei!*" Brother-in-law suddenly yelled in all directions.

"Why are you screaming?" I asked.

"To frighten the wolves," Brother-in-law answered. "Wolves attack sheep, and sometimes shouting works."

I hoped the wolves wouldn't come, at least while I was the herdsman. I yelled along with Brother-in-law.

We lit a candle in our tent and slept on the ground with a thick sheepskin beneath and several fleece-lined Tibetan robes atop us. It was very warm. We didn't undress, because we were afraid wolves would attack our sheep, and we might have to get up suddenly.

In the middle of the night we were awakened by the sound of stampeding sheep. I first thought I was at home but seeing Brother-in-law and the tent, I realized I was at the herding place. We put on our shoes quickly and raced outside. The sheep were running everywhere in groups, and I soon lost sight of Brother-in-law behind some fleeing sheep. I followed other sheep and called to them softly, but they were very fearful of the wolves and continued running. I was exhausted and ran slower and slower. I lost the sheep completely in the darkness. I searched for a while but found nothing.

Slowly I became very frightened in the darkness, and my mind suddenly filled with ghost stories. I tried to forget those dreadful thoughts by singing, my voice quivering with fear as I sang. There was no use continuing. Suddenly the most amazing story about this area came to my mind. I felt I couldn't move as I remembered it. I also felt a chill up my back. Uncle had told this story when I was at his home one night.

"A nomad family of four lived in a grazing place beyond the desert. One day, the oldest son found a dead marmot and brought it home."

"I killed this, Father!" he lied proudly.

"You are so brave!" the father said. "Let's boil it in our pot immediately."

"They boiled the marmot, ate it, and went to bed. The next morning, all the family members were dead in bed in a row."

Uncle said, after everyone in that family died, the place became haunted. Herdsman heard many ghostly sounds when they went there with their sheep. Their sheep scattered in terror. Later they discovered their sheep had died without any sign of what killed them. Herdsman never dared venture there again.

My recollection of Uncle's story terrified me so much that I didn't want to continue searching for the sheep. I turned around and ran and ran. I soon didn't know where our tent was. I looked around. I was surrounded by hundreds of ghostly hills. They seemed to have undergone some sort of terrible transformation after night fell. I was exhausted and couldn't continue. I wrapped myself in my robe, sat in the grass, rested, and heard wolves howling all around. I remained quiet and breathed lightly and carefully.

"Tsering Bum..." I heard Brother-in-law's call the next morning. Throughout the night, I had sat and waited. Fear had kept me awake. I hadn't slept a wink.

"I'm here! I'm here!" I yelled, waving my arms. I was finally courageous enough to make a sound.

One sheep was killed that night and completely devoured by the wolves. Another had been bitten in the throat and was on the verge of death. Brother-in-law had herded the others back to the tent site. "That one will die," Brother-in-law said sadly, looking at the injured sheep.

"Why? We can feed it," I said.

Brother-in-law continued, "You can feed it if you want to but it's hopeless. Its throat is seriously wounded and will become infected soon."

Luckily, there were no further wolf attacks, but the sheep continued to run about at night whenever they heard anything, and then we had to get up and search for them.

Three days later, we ran out of drinking water. The sheep were very thirsty. We put the injured sheep, which had died the previous night, on our mule and started home.

"Do you think herding is enjoyable now?" Brother-in-law asked.

"Yes, it's great fun!" I lied. Actually, I realized it was extremely difficult. But if I hadn't gone herding, I wouldn't have known how difficult such a life was.

Brother-in-law laughed uncontrollably at my answer.

## TSOMO'S KARMA

I have seen three people die in my village: my uncle, my aunt, and my neighbor, a girl. My uncle and aunt died of cancer when I was in middle school. The girl, like most Tibetan females, had a difficult life, and her death was tragic.

One day, I was hungrily returning home from school. All the way home the only thing I could think about was lunch. It was the usual question I considered when I was coming home from school. As I neared home, I heard people sobbing. Old and young people's voices blended together into loud, miserable laments. Women, carrying baskets of yak dung, and men, with bricks of tea and bottles of canola oil, were going to my neighbor's home. I knew someone had died, but I didn't know who it was.

"Mother, who died in Tsomo's home?" I asked quietly.

"Tsomo," Mother said.

"What?" I exclaimed in shock.

"After she married, she was regularly possessed by a ghost. She often spoke strangely and behaved like a stranger in her home. She became normal when her relatives took her to the hospital, and the doctors said that she was not sick, but when she returned home, she was ill or possessed by the ghost again," Mother said.

"Didn't her relatives invite lamas to do rituals?" I asked.

"Yes, but they were too late. She died before the lamas arrived," Mother said.

She was only eighteen years old, and her suffering was unimaginable. She couldn't endure what her cruel karma dictated and left this human world.

Tsomo was her family's only daughter. Her mother had died of a sudden illness when she was five. Afterwards, Tsomo needed to do all the chores in her home. Like most Tibetan girls at that time, she was not sent to school. Instead, she stayed at home and helped her father, while her two brothers attended school. She was filial, never complained, and gained a good reputation. Many people told Tsomo's father that they wanted their son to marry her, but most

were discouraged by his excuse that Tsomo was too young. Actually, Tsomo's father was waiting for a rich man to come, not because he was greedy, but because he wanted Tsomo to have a comfortable life.

Tsomo often did construction work in the county seat during summer, earning about fifteen *yuan* a day. She gave the money to her father, and said the money should be put to family use. When she was sixteen and working as a plasterer's assistant, she met an eighteen-year-old Tibetan boy. They fell in love and soon were planning their marriage and future. Unfortunately, Tsomo's father learned about this relationship, followed her when she snuck out of the house one night, and found her with the boy in a bean field. He said nothing, but Tsomo's life changed completely a month later.

"Tsomo," her father said gently, "you will soon be seventeen. The time has come for you to leave home like other girls do."

"Father, I want to live with you forever. I will take care of you," Tsomo said tearfully.

"My dear daughter," Tsomo's father said, wiping tears from his daughter's cheeks, "it is our custom. If you stay at home longer, others will gossip that no-one wants to marry you."

Tsomo sobbed quietly.

"Lhudrud, from our neighboring village, came to our home several days ago," Tsomo's father continued. "He said that you are the best choice for his son."

This unexpected statement shocked Tsomo. She stopped crying and pondered, gazing into her father's pale, tired face.

"Father," Tsomo said suddenly, "I don't want to marry that man, I want..."

"Tsomo!" he interrupted. "I know you've got someone in your heart now, but he is from a poor family and can't compare with Lhudrud's son, he..."

"Father!" Tsomo wailed. "You only care about money! You don't care about me!" Then she ran into her room and closed the door.

"My daughter!" Tsomo's father shouted. "Some day you'll understand that I'm doing this for you!"

"Perhaps I'll never know," Tsomo called back from her room. Tsomo's father put his head down and said nothing.

Three days later, in the morning, when Tsomo's father got up to make the daily sacrificial fire, he saw a snow-white *khadag* on the

gate, signifying that Tsomo had eloped with her lover. Tsomo's father soon fell very ill, because he was heartbroken.

Tsomo had run away to another county, but when she heard that her father was ill, she remembered his kindness and was very worried. His image often appeared in her mind.

"I want to go back and see my father," she told her lover.

"Well," the man sighed, "if you go back, perhaps you'll never return."

"But..." she started.

"Remember," the man interrupted, "because of my love for you, I've also left my home behind. I've also got parents."

"But my sick father can't support my two brothers in school," Tsomo said, crying quietly.

"If you go," the man said angrily, "today is the end of our relationship."

"I love you," Tsomo said, still crying. "But my father raised me. He is old and needs to be taken care of."

This angered the man, who left without saying anything.

Two days later, Tsomo was back home. Her father was not angry with her. He lay on the *hyitsi* and looked at Tsomo. Tears filled his eyes.

"Father," Tsomo said, crying, "I'm sorry. I'll marry Lhudrud's son."

Tsomo's father remained quiet.

Five months later, after Tsomo's father had improved, Tsomo married into that wealthy home on an auspicious day.

According to the local custom, the groom's family gives money and other things to the bride's family. This is called '*jhed*' or 'treasure'. The groom's family gives money and other precious things to the bride's mother, called '*ami nedren*' or 'the price of the mother's milk'. Since Tsomo's mother had died long ago, there was no need to give *ami nedren*.

"Here is 10,000 *yuan* and two otter skins for your family," Lhudurd said on that propitious day.

"No, Lhudrud," Tsomo's father said. "My daughter is now your daughter. Please treat her like she is your own blood. That is enough for me."

Lhudrud urged Tsomo's father to take what he offered, but Tsomo's father demonstrated his conviction by swearing to the Three

Jewels. Nobody could say anything then. Tsomo now fully realized how much her father loved her.

Tsomo's life was very unhappy, because Lhudrud's son, Dorjee, frequently beat her. "Bitch!" Dorjee cursed. "You think you're still a flower? Don't treat me like an idiot. I know everything about you and that shameless dog you were with. Behave yourself and don't stain my family's reputation."

Tsomo could only weep. She accepted her destiny and didn't complain to anybody. Having heard all the rumors about Tsomo, Lhudrud had decided that she was shameless. So, he pretended nothing was happening when his son abused Tsomo.

Finally, Tsomo could no longer bear her situation. One morning, as her husband lay snoring, she ran back to her father's home without taking anything. She arrived before the roosters had crowed and found her father and her brothers still sleeping.

"Who is it?" Tsomo's father said when he heard knocking on the gate. He put on his clothes and came tiredly to open the gate.

Tsomo threw herself into her father's arms and wailed. He understood everything without Tsomo saying a word. Later, when Tsomo explained how her husband had mistreated her, she began weeping. Every word, like a sharp knife, jabbed her father's heart.

"My daughter!" Tsomo's father said bitterly. "It was my mistake to send you there. I ruined your life."

Day by day, Tsomo's father became increasingly ill and was eventually bedridden. Seeing her father's situation, Tsomo thought, "If I had stayed in Dorjee's home, Father would not be like this. This is all my fault."

Tsomo accepted the heavy work of caring for her father because she thought it was the only way to atone for her sins. Rumors abounded. "Tsomo ran away with a stranger and deserted her baby." "Dorjee chased her out of his home because she still has a relationship with that man." "She really is a shameless bitch." She was devastated by such malicious slander, and began behaving strangely. This led to rumors that her home was possessed by ghosts. After both Tsomo and her father became very ill, her brothers stopped school to stay at home and care for them. Tsomo died quietly one night. Her brothers found her dead in the morning. She was only eighteen years old.

"Mother, did we give anything to her family?" I asked.

"Yes, we did," Mother said sadly. "You may need to go to their home and turn prayer wheels all night. She was our neighbor and had a pitiful life. Take some days off from school and do religious activities in their home."

"Of course, Mother," I said.

Rich families cremate corpses and put their ashes in Tso Wonbo (Qinghai Lake). Tsomo's family was poor, so Tsomo's sick father asked a lama when was a good time to bury Tsomo. The answer was midnight of the next day.

I sat on the *hyitsi* in Tsomo's home with some other people, turning a prayer wheel. In front of us was a table with fresh mutton, good bread, candies, and cups of hot tea. If we were satisfied and happy, Tsomo would obtain a better life in her next incarnation. Veiled by a sheet of thin silk, I could see Tsomo's corpse on the other side of the table. Outside the room, the lamentations of Tsomo's father, brothers, and other relatives' seemed to fill the boundless sky. Tsomo's father and two brothers came in periodically and wailed, and then they would be led away. This made us cry quietly, but we continued spinning prayer wheels. The only thing we could do was chant "*Om Mani Peme Hung...*"

Thinking about Tsomo's tragic life kept me awake all night. Others came and replaced us as the first sunrays struck the *hyitsi* the next morning. Realizing that I would need to attend Tsomo's funeral that night, I went home and slept until the afternoon.

"Get up, boy," Mother called. "It's time."

I got up quickly, dressed, and went to Tsomo's home. I turned the prayer wheel as I had the previous night until it was time for us to take the corpse away. When midnight drew near, Tsomo's father and brothers wailed more loudly, for they knew what we would soon do. At midnight, some strong men restrained Tsomo's relatives while others made a way through the room so her corpse could be taken outside. As we exited Tsomo's home, her relatives cried ceaselessly. I saw from the corner of my eye that Tsomo's father had fallen unconscious. We ran with the corpse on a stretcher, following a man who knew the auspicious place the lama had identified. We ran and had almost exhausted ourselves when we reached a freshly dug, deep, rectangular grave. A cavity had been dug in a corner of the pit and there we placed Tsomo's corpse. We then closed the entrance to the cavity, filled the grave with soil, and piled earth on top. Everyone was

silent. None of Tsomo's relatives were present. The deceased's relatives do not attend the burial. If they do, their cries makes the soul of the deceased morose and reluctant to leave.

"Boy," Mother said the next day at lunchtime. "It's time for us to go. Your father is already there helping the others."

I suddenly remembered that we needed to go to Tsomo's home for lunch. "Yes, Mother, I'll be ready in a minute," I replied.

When Mother and I arrived, almost all the villagers were there, sitting cross-legged around short-legged tables, eating mutton, yogurt, and noodles, and drinking milk tea. It was exactly like a festival except everyone was sad. Mother and I were invited to sit and eat. I felt Tsomo was watching us somehow. We all felt her presence among us, wanting us to enjoy this time and be happy, for this would help her have a better life in her next incarnation.



Locals doing caterpillar fungus business on the streets of Montson County seat (Tsering Bum 2009).

## THE COUNTY PRIMARY SCHOOL

**A**t the age of fourteen, I resumed my study at the County Tibetan Primary School and met many of my former classmates. When I said, "Hello" or smiled at them, most of them didn't remember me. I realized what a small, unimportant role I had played when I had been there earlier. However, in one semester I became the vice-monitor of my class - Grade Four. My major responsibility was to help others with their studies.

I was not very brave. I became embarrassed, and my body shook like a naked person in a freezing wind, whenever many eyes gazed at me. To be the vice-monitor of the class meant I had to give speeches about study, class rules, activities outside the classroom, and so on. My face became red, and my heart pounded whenever I spoke in front of the class. If I had to make announcements, I went from student to student and spoke to them individually, so as to avoid the ordeal of public speaking.

"Tsering Bum," the Tibetan language teacher said, "you are the vice monitor and you should be braver. Why are you so timid? You have been with your classmates for more than three months. Change your ways. Don't let your shyness ruin your future."

"Yes, Teacher," I said in a trembling voice. "I know I'm not brave, but I've been like this since I was born. It's my introspective personality. It takes time to change."

"How can I help you?" the teacher asked.

"Just give me time and more chances to speak. I'm sure you'll see some change," I answered.

"OK," the teacher said. "I hope you can do that."

My primary school Tibetan teacher changed my life. He and his wife were both poets. He often asked us to write essays, and then he and his wife corrected them. We had to be in the classroom every morning at six. He would be there too, and would study with us. He loved to teach Tibetan history.

My Tibetan teacher also influenced my attitude towards study. I no longer wanted to stay at home and be a farmer. Instead, I wanted to become knowledgeable, help many people, and care for my parents with the money I earned using my knowledge. It was a wonderful thought, and my Tibetan teacher was delighted when I wrote an article about this dream for my future. Unfortunately, our dreams are often not realized.

"Brother," my oldest sister said to me one day, "you are almost fifteen. You should stop attending school, stay at home, and help our parents."

I said nothing. Even though my parents were in their fifties, they still had to work in the fields. Mother was frequently unwell, nevertheless, she still fed the pigs, cleaned the pigsty, milked the cows, fed them, and cooked for us. Father often shouldered a shovel and went here and there, watering vegetables and trees in the yard behind my family's house, and herding our sheep. He often got a backache from doing heavy work and then couldn't sleep well.

"As you know," Sister continued, "our brother is in school in Chabcha (the prefecture seat), and your two other sisters and I are married and live away from home. There's only you to care for our parents."

I kept quiet. I wanted to go to school, but I also wanted my parents to be comfortable. I didn't know what to say.

"After you finish fifth grade, stay at home and work. We'll get a good wife for you," Sister said. My sisters were very kind, and didn't want to see my parents suffer the burden of heavy farm work. Every day, I thought about dropping out after I finished primary school, but this thought was very painful.

"You should go to middle school and then to university. You can't just stop here," my Tibetan teacher said when I told him my plan.

"But what about my parents? How can they live without my support?" I said.

"This is the biggest mistake we Tibetans make! Without pain now, where will the future glory be!" he said emotionally.

I sadly and silently stared at the ground.

"Anyway," he continued, "if you still consider me your teacher, please do as I say. You should convince your siblings to let you stay in

school." He sighed deeply and walked away. "Hey!" he yelled, turning back. "Do well on the final exam!"

I smiled in reply. My great advantage in study was that things outside my classes didn't influence me, and even though I was in a bad mood, I still did well on my Tibetan, Chinese, math, science, and physical training tests. After all the exams, the headmaster ended the term by saying we would get our results next semester. I was glad when the term ended, because I would see Brother again several days later.

"What?" Brother yelled when all my sisters assembled and told him their plan for my future. "Make Tsering Bum stay at home? Why? He's such a good student!"

"Tseter!" my older sister said. "You're old enough to understand. Don't you realize how difficult it is for our parents now?"

Brother said nothing for a minute. "Sisters," he said after contemplating for a while, "I'll stay at home and take care of our parents. I can..."

"What? What are you all talking about?" Father said from outside Brother's room. He and Mother were in the kitchen, wondering what we were all doing together. He entered the living room and said, "What are you discussing?" My oldest sister told him everything.

"Well," Father said, "I think my son should stay in school and study, not be a farmer."

Nobody said anything. We all knew that Father wanted me to have a good life. He and Mother didn't want their children to suffer.

"We can work and make a living until he graduates from college," Father continued. "All of you must support him to go to school, especially you, because you will graduate from the teacher training school next year and then get an official job. You must pay his tuition."

"Certainly," Brother said happily.

Father's words were the law in my home and nobody dared disobey. That was the final consensus that determined my destiny. I was delighted but also felt pain seeing more and more snow-white hair on my parents' heads.

During the holiday, I thought about telling this news to my Tibetan teacher, and was very eager to see him in school again. Thinking that he would take us to monasteries, introduce us to

Buddhist deities, and tell us Buddhist history, made me yearn to see him.

"Please! Can you say it again?" I said in disbelief on the first day of school to Zhuoma, who was the first person I met that day. I was very happy to meet her, but what she told me really devastated me.

"Our Tibetan teacher went to another country without telling anybody," she said.

"Really? Only him?" I said.

"Of course not. He also took his wife, daughter, and his niece with him," she said.

"How do you know?" I asked.

"He called his other relatives when they arrived there and told them where they were," she said.

Suddenly, there was only anguish in my heart. "Why? Why did he leave us? We still have many things to learn from him. Don't you think he was great?" I said.

"Yes," Zhoma said sadly. "I think he is a great teacher, but he has his own reasons."

Visiting monasteries, learning history, and telling him my relatives' decision were all impossible now. Everybody was depressed for a long while. But we had a new teacher; a good, knowledgeable man who treated us like his own children. Gradually, fewer and fewer students talked about our former teacher, but he remained in everyone's heart. Someone would periodically say, "Without pain now, where will the future glory be?"



Children playing in Kgeiwa Village lanes (Tsering Bum 2009).

## SWIMMING

**T**sering Bum!" Tsebum Gyal called from in front of my home. I stopped watching television and ran out. "Would you like to go swimming?" he asked. "Many people are waiting for you to join us."

"Swimming?" I said happily. "Yes, of course I want to go." Swimming in the Monch River was a favorite activity for village boys. We went swimming in the Monch River almost every day in summer. It was great fun.

"Mother will scold me if she knows I've been swimming. She always worries that I'll drown," I said.

"Is your mother at home?" he asked.

"No, she's out cutting grass for the cows right now," I said.

"So it doesn't matter. She won't know it if we return early," he said.

Though I didn't want Mother to worry, my eagerness to swim drove me to Monch River. We took off our clothes, spread them on the grass, and jumped naked into the river. I swam on my back slowly. It was like floating in the air. Later, we splashed water on each other until we were almost suffocated with exhaustion. "Guys?" I said. "Shall we rest?"

"Sure," they answered. We climbed up on the riverbank, lay on our clothes and talked about our plans for the next day.

"I think we should go into a forest and steal pheasant eggs," Tsebum said, proud of his idea.

"How boring! Have you forgotten? We did that about eight days ago! I think we should each borrow a bicycle tomorrow and have a race on the flat road to the county town," Zhabu said.

We clapped our hands in agreement and promised that we would borrow bicycles when we got to our homes after swimming. Although our skin was burnt by the scorching sunshine, and we had become very brown, we still lay on the riverbank, enjoying the warmth. I gazed at the mountain range on the other side of Monch River. It seemed so near, and taller than other mountains. If a person

stood at its foot and looked up, his hat would fall off the instant his eyes met the peak. An endless desert plateau and a small amount of grazing land lay behind the mountain range. Seeing the mountain range and thinking about those scenes made me remember an event that had happened the previous year...

It was a Sunday and, as usual, I was watching a TV show while doing my homework. My parents did not usually allow me to do two things at once, but since they were in the county town purchasing salt, MSG (a flavor enhancer), vinegar, and other items, I disobeyed them.

"These people don't give me a minute's rest!" Father exclaimed to Mother outside. Their conversation was becoming clearer as they neared the kitchen.

Realizing they were coming to the kitchen, and I was in danger of being found out, I quickly turned off the TV and pretended to concentrate on my homework. "What happened, Father?" I asked.

Father seemed angry and kept quiet. He sat on the edge of the *hyitsi*, sighing angrily. Mother stood silently beside him, her expression full of worry and agitation. Father stood suddenly and went outside.

"What happened, Mother?" I asked worriedly.

"Some of our village's cows wandered into the nomad community's grazing land behind the mountain range today," Mother said.

"Whose family is responsible for the cows today?" I asked.

"Radan. He was herding the cows this morning. When he realized some of them had gone into the other community's grazing land, he ran to bring them back. Some nomads saw him and tried to take the cows away. Radan fought with them. Of course, two fists can't defeat more than ten. He was seriously beaten," Mother said.

My village had a rule that every family with cows took turns herding all the cows. I felt very lucky, because I had herded more than 200 five days earlier. Fortunately, they hadn't trespassed at that time.

"How is Brother Radan now?" I asked Mother.

"He crawled home about an hour ago. His family members took him to the hospital," Mother said.

"Will our village men fight the nomads?" I asked fearfully.

"Yes. That's why people came to the county town to call your father. They want your father to lead them in the fight," mother said.

Both of us were very worried about Father's safety. Later, my oldest sister was so worried that she also came home. We went to the village border, where many people were looking along the road that led up to the grazing land. A government official came on a motorcycle and informed us in Chinese that he had received the news earlier, and police and other government workers had been sent to the pasture to control the situation. Now, he reported, the men from both villages were resting and looking at each other with the police between them. What the government official said greatly relieved us.

"It is almost three, and your father didn't even get a chance to have lunch today," Mother said to Sister.

"I'll take food to Father and Brother-in-law," I boldly suggested.

"No, it's very dangerous," Mother chided.

"I also think it's inappropriate," Sister added.

"Don't worry, I'm too young. Even if there is a fight, they won't do anything to me," I said.

They decided this was reasonable and agreed. I took a bag of bread, stuffed two bottles of hot tea into my bag, and set off to find Father and Brother-in-law. On the way, I decided to take a short cut that required me to climb up a steep cliff. I felt dizzy when I got halfway up. I felt like vomiting as I continued climbing, and then I realized that I was feeling the altitude. "Such a shame. Why should I feel the altitude today? This hasn't happened to me before!" I thought. I lay against a huge rock and rested, but I couldn't control my body. Something was dragging me down. Fear filled my mind. "I don't want to die!" I murmured and struggled up again. In the end, my shortcut didn't save any time. In fact, it took longer than usual. I looked down at Monch River from atop the mountain range; it resembled a long, skinny snake sunbathing on a meadow. I felt dizzy again, quickly pulled my head back, and walked away.

"Why are you here? How did you come here?" Father asked the moment he saw me. Brother-in-law also looked at me in surprise.

"Mother thought you would be hungry," I said, "so I brought food for you."

I didn't say anything about how I had got there, or Father would have scolded me for taking such a dangerous journey route. Father shared the bread and tea with the others, who were also hungry. I wasn't sure whether Father and Brother-in-law had had

enough to eat. "Father, why don't you all come home?" I asked, noticing the men sitting on the ground, playing cards and chess.

"The government officials and police say they will imprison whoever starts fighting first. They know they can't chase us back to our village, so the government has invited a lama from Lhedtsang Monastery to mediate. He is with the nomads now, persuading them to stop this fighting between brothers."

"Will you stop fighting if the lama says to go home?" I asked.

"Er..." Father hesitated. "I think so. How can we disobey a lama?"

I felt happy to hear this and wished the lama would come soon to stop this shameful struggle.

Everyone jumped up when somebody yelled, "The lama is coming!" Everyone lowered their heads and didn't make a sound.

"I told them to pay the medical expenses of the injured person from your village," the lama said tiredly. He looked like he was in his eighties, but he had still come here on a terrible road to try and solve this conflict between two Tibetan communities. I wondered how many problems of ordinary people he had solved, and how many people's lives he had saved.

"If you follow Tibetan Buddhism, toss these piles of stones away and use your bows and arrows only for archery contests!" he said.

The villagers reluctantly threw the piles of stones away and listened to the lama. The people who had arrows and bows in their hands looked guilty and lowered their heads as the lama talked.

"You were about to fight with your brothers today. Do you want to see more Tibetans without fathers and husbands? All of you should be ashamed of your behavior today!" the lama scolded.

Nobody said a thing, creating a situation resembling a quiet valley on a moonless night.

"Go back to your homes, to your children and wives. They are waiting for you in great anguish," the lama said sadly.

The men looked at each other for a while and then gazed at Father, who hesitated for a short moment and then started walking away. Others followed him. It was almost evening when we got home. Brother had been so worried when he heard about the conflict between my village and the nomad village that he had returned home

from his school in Chabcha. My other two sisters had also come from their homes.

"Father, you're getting old, and I want you to retire and have a quiet life," Brother said after Father had supper and was resting.

"Yes," Oldest Sister said. "This is what we decided before you returned."

"Don't worry about village matters anymore," Younger Sister said. "Look at your age! You needn't join village conflicts if you retire."

"We beg you, Father!" Youngest Sister pleaded, almost crying.

"Please give me a chance to speak!" Father exclaimed.

We all shut up.

"OK. I didn't realize you were all so worried. Please give me some time to find a good chance to retire. I won't make my children worry about me again!" Father promised, delighting us all. "I have been village leader for thirty years, and I think it's time for me to retire," Father concluded.

"Ah!" I yelled, as my buddies sprinkled water over my brown naked body. I had been daydreaming, and the cold water jerked me back from my recollections.

"Come into the water!" Tsebum Gyal shouted, his head above the briskly flowing water.

"OK, I'm coming!" I said, plunging into the river from the riverbank.

## GRANDFATHER

**A**re you a good archer?" Grandfather asked. He was in my home when I returned from practicing archery.

"Not really," I said, "but I'm trying to improve."

"That's good to hear. I remember something that happened in my life when I was about your age," Grandfather said.

"Tell me, Grandfather. I'm eager to hear it!" I said excitedly. Here is what Grandfather told me.

When I was about seventeen. My family lived in Hualong County. That's where I was born. Life was very difficult at that time. Battles were common and we had to pay a lot of food, animals, and money in taxes to a White Chinese army leader, Ma Bufang. He never showed any mercy and his soldiers killed countless people. They went village by village, forcing young, healthy men to become soldiers. Even though families with soldiers had to pay less tax, nobody wanted to be soldiers because everyone understood the only consequence of being a soldier was death. I was young and healthy, and I was forced to be a soldier. Mother lamented my bad karma.

"Your father died in the war fighting the Red Chinese, and now you are going to follow him. How pitiful our life is!" Mother lamented.

"Mother, we know fighting is not our business, but what can we do? They forced Father to die; they killed him. Now, they are pushing us over the cliff of death. I have no alternative," I said.

"Yes, there is an alternative," Mother said suddenly and stopped wailing. "We can run away when it is dark. Let's leave this place forever!"

"Yes, that's a good idea," I gladly agreed. "Let's pack some useful things quickly and get ready." That night, under the cover of darkness, Mother, Younger Sister, and I escaped. We had nowhere to go. We begged for food during the day and slept in the homes of kind Tibetans whenever we could. We never stayed long in one place because of our fear of Ma's soldiers chasing us and making troubles for those kind people. We wandered here and there. Mother became so sick she could no

longer walk when we reached a village near the Yellow River in Xinghai County. The kind Tibetans in that village pitied us, and made a small adobe house for us. We made our home there, and began cultivating barley and wheat with the local people. They invited us if there was a wedding or other celebration in the village. And, of course, if there was a conflict with another village, they asked me to join them. We had a good life there.

Everyone in the village was busy preparing for Losar when the village leader rushed into my home. "We will have an archery contest with Yunch Village during Losar. We will discuss it this afternoon in the village meeting hall. Be there on time!" he said. I loved archery and this news delighted me. All the village men assembled in the meeting hall that afternoon. We waited for the village leader, made jokes, and laughed. Nobody got angry on such occasions. Suddenly, the village leader arrived with many White Chinese soldiers, who surrounded us with rifles.

"All right, great men," one said. He wore a round, white hat and had a pistol tucked in his belt. "Today is your lucky day, because you will all become my men."

Nobody said anything. We only looked at the village leader furiously, for we were sure he had betrayed us.

"If any of you dislike conflict or dislike me, you can leave now. But I promise that you, you will not reach your homes alive," the commander said.

Looking down at the ground desperately, nobody argued. Sadness filled our hearts.

"All right, if you don't have any questions, stay in the meeting hall tonight; we will leave tomorrow morning," he said. "Oh, I forgot!" he turned and said, as he was about to leave the meeting hall, "Happy New Year."

The village leader and three soldiers stayed with us. "Why did you do this?" asked a villager angrily.

"Some of those came to my home secretly last night and forced me to do this. They took my wife and daughter hostage. They said they would only release them if I called all of you. I'm sorry, but I didn't want my daughter and wife to die. They are innocent," the village leader said despondently.

We were still very upset with him, for he had exchanged more than one hundred people's lives for two lives! But everyone kept quiet. What could we do? Kill the village leader? What was the use of killing him? That New Year's Eve, more than one hundred men stayed in the meeting hall without their relatives, which made us all very sad. I thought, "I wandered to this place to avoid recruitment, but now I'm about to be forced into the army."

"You are very handsome in that uniform!" I flattered one soldier while others were dozing. "Luckily, I'll be a soldier, too."

"Really? In my experience, most Tibetans don't like to be soldiers on any side," said the man in a smattering of heavily accented Tibetan.

"I'm different from others. I love fighting," I said.

"Ha..." the man laughed quietly.

"Brother, everything in the army will be new to me, so you have to teach me. Be my teacher!" I said.

"Don't worry, I'll teach you," he said.

"Then Brother, how about going to my home now, and you can teach me some basic army rules. Tonight is Tibetan New Year. We are leaving tomorrow, and I want to see my old mother," I said.

"Er..." he hesitated.

"I beg you, Brother," I entreated.

"OK, you have invited me to your home. I can see you are very sincere," he said.

"Yes, I'm telling the truth," I replied.

"You can join your mother, but I must stay here. Remember to come back before dawn," he said.

"Lucky you. Otherwise I would have gotten you drunk and killed you," I thought.

"OK, it's really a pity you can't join me," I said, pretending to be unhappy.

"Ha..." said the man. "We will have more chances in the future."

Mother and Sister were crying when I got my home. They were happily surprised the moment they saw me. I told them everything quickly.

"Son, flee to a distant place and never return. Quickly!" Mother said.

"But how about you and Sister? Perhaps they will kill you," I said sadly.

"No, they won't. I'll say you didn't come home tonight. I think that will solve it," Mother said.

"No, Mother, let's leave together. I can carry you!" I insisted.

"I'm really tired of roaming around and begging. Besides, your sister is old enough to take care of me. Don't worry," Mother said, putting bread in a fabric bag.

I couldn't convince Mother. I took the bag, prostrated three times to Mother, and left without looking back. I was sure Mother was wailing, and looking back would only increase both of our sorrow.

I hid among the trees on a forested mountain beyond our village and watched. More than a hundred men in a line, accompanied by the soldiers, left the village on the morning as the roosters crowed. Their relatives wept, their wails echoing in the mountains. The sound seemed powerful enough to cause an earthquake. I beseeched the Three Jewels silently, hoping Mother and Sister were safe.

I wandered everywhere, begging for food when I was hungry and sleeping on the grassland, in forests, and sometimes even in trees.

Once I was walking in a forest. I was extremely hungry and tired, I found a place under a big tree where I could shelter from the wind. There, I slept, and dreamed about going home and eating a bowl of noodles with Mother and Sister. We were very happy. However, as I ate the noodles, I saw blood coming from Mother's nostrils, but Mother was still smiling. "Mother! Blood!" I said, pointing at her nose with my right hand.

Mother only smiled at Sister and me. I then peered at Sister. Horrifyingly, blood was seeping from her nostrils and her eyes. The bowl of noodles fell from my left hand. "Mother!" I screeched, and then I woke up from my nightmare.

I decided that something awful must have happened to Mother and Sister and sobbed silently. Suddenly, from not far away, I saw many glowing eyes looking at me - the eyes of hungry wolves! I quickly untied the sash from around my waist and set fire to one end, because I knew wolves were afraid of fire. I whirled the sash around my head and yelled "Gwei!" The frightened wolves fled. Unfortunately, my sash was completely burnt after a while, and the wolves returned and came nearer and nearer. There was nothing I could do. I removed my Tibetan robe, dropped it on the ground, and climbed up a tree. I sat on a big tree branch and watched the wolves sniffing my robe, baring their sharp, shining fangs and leaping up, trying to reach me. I was on a very high branch, and their efforts were in vain. I felt very cold without my Tibetan robe, but I was sure the wolves would leave when day came, so I waited for the sun to appear. As the sun's first rays glimmered into the forest, the morning birds started twittering, and gradually, the wolves left one by one. At last I was free. I embraced the tree trunk tightly and napped in the sunshine. Suddenly, I remembered the dream and started worrying.

"I must go home and see Mother and Sister, but Mother will be very sorrowful if she sees me in this condition. I must return like a man, not like a beggar," I thought. I then wandered to a herding place. The Tibetan nomads were very kind and gave

me mutton, butter, *tsamba*, and cheese when I begged. Seeing my sash-less robe, one nomad woman gave me an old sash. It was the first time I had felt much human warmth in my wandering days. Later, I herded yaks and sheep for a rich family who provided me with good food, warm clothes, and a comfortable place to sleep. In return, I was very careful and didn't lose any sheep or yaks when I was on duty. I also had fun there with other herdsman. We visited girls at night and sometimes returned to our tents early, but usually, it wasn't until morning. Despite this good life, I missed Mother and Sister. Thinking about their difficult life was painful. I didn't know if they were dead or alive.

A year later, when I had some clothes, *tsamba*, butter, and other things, I realized it was time to leave. "I'm very grateful to you for your kindness," I said to the head of the family one night. "But the time has come for me to leave. I must visit my mother and sister."

"Oh?" said the family head. My statement astonished him. I said, "I will stay here until you find another herdsman."

"Aren't we treating you kindly?" he enquired.

"It's just, really... the time has come, and I must go," I repeated.

"You are honest and kind, and I was about to marry my third daughter to you!" he said. What he said was beyond my expectation. I was shocked. Even though his third daughter was not beautiful, she treated everyone nicely, and everybody loved her.

"Nyangmo Ter is a good girl, but we are not fated to be together," I said,

"You dislike her, right?" the family head asked a little angrily.

"No, it's not like that, it's just because..." and I told them my story and everything about Mother and Sister.

At the end of my story, the lady of the family cried for my mother, sister, and my bad karma. Other family members wore sympathetic expressions.

"Hell is the best place for Ma Bufang and his dogs!" the family head exclaimed in frustration.

I said nothing. Telling them my story had made me very nostalgic.

"You work hard, and you are honest and kind. We thought that you were the best choice for our daughter. But now we know you've got a home to go to. We understand your situation, and we won't pressure you," the family head said.

I thanked him for understanding.

Five days later, they found another herdsman, and I left the next day with my earnings. Before I left, the lady of the family gave me a big piece of good quality silk and told me to use it to make clothes for Mother and Sister. Her warm sincerity almost made me burst into tears.

Fearing other people would see me, I arrived at my home secretly in the middle of the night. Mother and Sister were terrified the moment they saw me, because they thought I was a ghost.

Ma's army had done nothing to them, but they were leading a miserable life. Mother was ill and couldn't work. Sister did the chores, farming, and everything else. I had to leave after giving them what I had brought.

"Son, you must go, or some shameless people will report this to Ma's soldiers, and they'll come and catch you," Mother urged as the morning roosters crowed.

After promising to visit them at least once every two months, I left and resumed wandering. Sometimes I herded livestock for families in nomad areas and sometimes I built adobe walls with other wanderers in farming places. I continued visiting Mother and Sister at night. Two years later, the White Chinese were banished and Ma and his faithful dogs ran to Taiwan. I then went home happily.

Our village was near the Yellow River, and our farming land was often flooded. I heard Montson was a good place, so we moved here.

Mother died of sickness two years later. She was lucky to have died then, because she didn't have to suffer through the Cultural Revolution.

As Grandfather finished his story, it was almost dark.

"Boy, take your grandfather back to his village on our motorcycle," Father said.

I readily agreed because I was eager for a chance to ride the motorcycle. Driving the motorcycle with Grandfather behind me, I thought about his life. He and others like him had suffered a great deal, and had much to say about their lives. Now they are very old, and we are not sure how much longer they would live. The death of an old person is the end of a history!

## LOSAR

**L**osar is locally celebrated on the first day of the first lunar month of the Chinese lunar calendar. During the fifteen days of Losar, people are excited, wear their best Tibetan clothes, enjoy delicious food, and treat everyone like their own relatives. Men drink liquor together in any home they enter, while women visit each other and relax. However, there are many things to do before and during Losar.

I was old enough to do heavy work when I was a middle school student. Every year, just after school was let out for the winter holiday, it was nearly time to prepare for Losar.

"Tsering Bum!" Oldest Brother-in-law called. "Come help us!"

I was watching TV that day. Brother-in-law and some relatives were helping my family butcher a big, fat pig. Butchering a pig is a sure sign of Losar's approach. Every family butchers at least one pig to eat during the New Year celebrations. I ran out to see what they wanted me to do. It was really frightening! They tied the pig's front and hind legs together and then knocked it down on a big, strong wooden plank. They were waiting for me as the pig squealed loudly and miserably for its life. "Go get a clean basin," Brother-in-law ordered, holding a long, sharp knife in his right hand. I quickly washed a basin and returned.

"Hold the basin under my knife as I stab it into the pig's heart," Brother-in-law said. "Don't let the blood spill outside the basin."

I did as he ordered, thinking my job was the easiest. The moment the knife entered its heart, the pig squealed. The knife jerked up and down with the pig's fading heartbeats, and slowly, the knife stopped moving. Now that it was dead, everyone moved away in relief. We were all quiet, especially Brother-in-law. I was sure he was sad. After lighting a canola oil lamp for the pig, Father came out from the family shrine, chanting scriptures. We also chanted, following him. After a short time, we put the pig carcass into a huge pot full of hot water. After several minutes, we put it on the plank again and rubbed

the skin with pieces of bricks and other rough materials to remove the bristles. Next, we washed the carcass with clean water again until the skin glistened in the sun. Grasping its legs, we carried it inside the family courtyard and started removing the intestines. Uncle's son, Yundrun Gyal, and were assigned the task of cleaning out the intestines. Yundrun Gyal held an intestine, and I poured warm water into it. He shook it up and down and then poured out the contents. Then, I poured water in again. We repeated this until the intestines were clean. Brother-in-law chopped meat, mixed it with the blood in the basin, stirred, and added salt and other spices. Finally, we stuffed the intestines with the materials from the basin. Mother cooked pork and sausages for us when we finished.

Mother thanked the helpers.

"Is there anything else we can do for your family?" Yundrun Gyal asked.

"No, thanks. The next step is all my responsibility," Mother said.

"What else do you need me to do?" I asked Mother.

"I need to deep-fry bread with your sister tomorrow, and I also need to salt the pork and store it. Pork is needed most during planting time, not during Losar," Mother explained.

I frequently accompanied Father to the county town to purchase goods for Losar during the next few days. The county town was full of Tibetan nomads and farmers from the mountains and other townships. Father and I bought boxes of barley liquor, cartons of cigarettes, and candies and apples for children. Every day, we carried our purchases back home, thinking that we had finished buying everything we needed, and then the next day, realized that we lacked something, and returned to the county town.

"How much is this?" Father asked a seller in Qinghai Chinese dialect, pointing to a bunch of green chilies.

"Five *yuan* per *jin*," she muttered. She was wearing a facemask to protect herself from the coldness of winter.

"What!" Father shouted. "Wasn't it three *yuan* two days ago?"

"Yes, but now it's almost New Year, so prices are higher," the seller said.

"Then we don't need any," Father said, turning away. That day, we didn't buy anything because of the over-inflated prices, so we walked home empty-handed. "Those people are always waiting for

chances like that to cheat us," Father said on the way home. "But what can we do? Tibetans don't like to do business. Such a degenerate custom!"

I heard Brother-in-law's tractor early the next morning while I was still in bed and realized it was New Year's Eve. Brother-in-law, Brother, and I had to get ice. Even though I was tired of cleaning the house, doing laundry, and shopping, I got up quickly in fear Father and Mother would call me lazy. Without washing my face or eating breakfast, I went out to the tractor where Brother-in-law and Brother were impatiently waiting for me.

We put pieces of ice atop walls on New Year's Eve, in the center of our threshing grounds, and in fields near the village. Elders say that it is best to light butter and canola oil lamps in glasses, not cover them, and put them on the walls but, of course, it is impossible to do that. How can poor farmers sacrifice so much when they have so little in their daily life? Ice is thus an ideal substitute.

We usually get ice near Lhedtsang Monastery, where there are 108 springs. People from my village and the neighboring Tibetan village were there, chopping chunks of ice from the many frozen streams. Holding a basket in my hands, I followed Brother-in-law and Brother, who began chopping ice with spades.

"Tsering Bum, what time did you get up this morning?" Older Brother Dundrub called, busily putting pieces of ice into his tractor as his brother hacked energetically at the ice with a spade.

My face reddened. I guessed that he had noticed I hadn't washed my face. I smiled and said nothing.

"Oh, I see," he continued jokingly. "You are a student and used to sleeping in." Everyone from both villages who heard it laughed. I continued smiling and said nothing. It was the best answer I could provide.

An hour later, we had collected enough ice for both my family and Brother-in-law's family. We returned home, where I got a chance to fill my empty stomach.

At sunset that day, the villagers busily began putting pieces of ice atop their walls. I scrambled up on the walls and started doing the same. It was scary to stand on walls that were four meters high. I caught the pieces of ice Brother threw from below and then steadied them atop the walls. When we finished, and I was standing on the ground, I felt how safe our Mother Earth is!

"Tsering Bum!" Father called to me from the family shrine as Brother and I were resting after finishing our work. "Go bring in the sheep."

My family had about twenty sheep, which were in a small, fenced pasture. Most were dedicated to our protector deity and other mountain deities, and we couldn't kill them, otherwise disasters would strike our family.

"Why? It's still very early," I said to Father.

"Have you forgotten?" Father said. "Today is New Year's Eve!"

This suddenly reminded me that every New Year's Eve, Father tied small pieces of silk dedicated to the deities on the right shoulders of the sheep.

"Oh, yes," I replied. "I'll go now."

As I opened the gate, the sheep rushed out without paying any attention to me, and found their way home by themselves. Instead of entering their enclosure, they rushed into the kitchen like bandits, sniffing around and looking for green vegetables and pig food. I got angry at their behavior and beat them with a poker until Mother stopped me by shouting, "They are promised to our mountain deities! If you do that, disasters will befall you!" Then she and I slowly pushed them out of the kitchen.

"Catch that one!" Father ordered, pointing to a white sheep with a black spot on its right hind leg.

I caught the sheep easily because they were familiar with my family members. I held the sheep's horns tightly as Father chanted and tied a piece of silk on the sheep's right shoulder. Finally, he purified the sheep in smoke from smoldering juniper branches and I released it. In the same fashion, we repeated this ritual for all the sheep that were offered to the deities.

Losar is an annual family reunion. After sunset, Oldest sister and Brother-in-law, and their two sons, came to my home for dinner. My other two sisters had families in other villages, and they only came to visit during the fifteen days of Losar. For New Year's Eve dinner, we enjoyed the best food available - pig head meat. After eating, Father, Brother-in-law, and Brother began drinking together while the rest of us sat beside them and enjoyed our own beverages. At about ten p.m., everyone tiredly went to bed for only two hours because we had to get up and visit other households at midnight.

"Bang! Bang! Bang!" the sound of firecrackers from the county town echoed through the village at midnight, awakening everybody. I jumped up and donned my best Tibetan robe and leather boots. As I left, I saw Father making an offering fire on the altar and heard him call the mountain deities' names, beseeching them to give good luck, success, and health to Brother and me.

"Let's do it before others come," Brother told me after donning his Tibetan robe.

I agreed.

He went in front of my parents and said, "Father and Mother, I wish you Happy New Year!" and then prostrated three times before them.

"You will live for more than a century, you will wear the very best clothes, you will have the very best food, you will have only success in the future," Father said to Brother as he was prostrating.

After Brother finished, Mother took a big red apple from a box and gave it to him. I followed Brother's example, and Father and Mother did the same for me.

"Happy New Year!" When it was almost one in the morning, relatives visited our home in turn. They all tried to prostrate to my parents, but my parents refused by saying, "We are not reincarnate lamas or mountain deities. Please prostrate in our family shrine."

Brother and I were busiest at such times. I repeatedly heated up mutton and pork while Brother boiled milk tea and served it to the guests. Village children came, group after group. Brother and I gave five candies to each child, and then they left happily. Father and Mother went to bed after all the relatives were gone, leaving Brother and me to manage the hosting. My family also needed a representative to visit other families, and since I was younger than Brother, it was my pleasure and good luck. Taking tea bricks, white silk *khadag*, and bottles of barley liquor, I visited our relatives first. As I was prostrating to Uncle and Aunt, my cousin arrived.

"Can you go with me to other families?" I asked Cousin secretly when I finished kowtowing.

"Of course we can go together," he said.

"You are young, and people will not force you to drink, but I'm a middle school student, and they think I'm old enough to drink," I explained.

"What's the connection between those two things?" Cousin asked.

"Well, then you must take me home when I become drunk," I said, which made Cousin laugh.

I quickly became tipsy after Uncle offered me several cups of barley liquor. Then, unusually, I became very brave and without anyone asking me, I sang folksongs one after another. I can't imagine how badly I sang! I was very groggy after drinking liquor in several homes. Cousin held my arm, and we went to more homes together. "Whose family is this?" I asked. "Why have they closed the gate during Losar?"

"This is Nansham Bum's family," Cousin said. "We shouldn't visit his home, because they didn't put ice on the walls."

"Nobody in his family died last year," I said in surprise. "Why don't they celebrate Losar?"

"Nansham Bum came to our village from Chiga County," Cousin explained. "I think one of his relatives in that county died, so he's not celebrating Losar."

"That makes sense. Let's visit another home," I suggested.

Cousin escorted me home after visiting elders in a few families, not because I was too intoxicated or tired of visiting, but because I needed to help Brother entertain guests in my own home. The whole night, Brother and I sat in the sitting room, pouring milk tea and offering liquor and meat to guests. Brother never let any man leave until he had become very drunk. As cocks crowed in the morning, Father and Mother got up to replace us. Realizing I would have to get up again and visit relatives in other villages soon, I didn't bother returning to bed, but stayed with Father and Mother in the sitting room.

"Wake up!" Mother called. "It's almost noon. You should visit your sister in Tawa Village."

The number of visitors was decreasing, and I was dozing on the sofa. "Yes, Mother," I replied sleepily. Tawa Village was nearby – it only took five minutes on motorcycle to get there.

"Happy New Year!" I yelled as I entered the gate of Older Sister's home.

"Happy New Year!" Older Brother-in-law said, coming toward me tipsily from the sitting room. Holding me by my right arm, he dragged me into the sitting room. Several strangers were there

drinking beer. "Today is Losar. We should be happy, right?" Brother-in-law said, offering me a huge cup of beer.

"Yes, yes, but..." I stammered.

"Don't worry," Brother-in-law interrupted. "I'll explain to Father. He won't scold you for drinking during Losar."

"It doesn't matter if he drinks today," Sister said, coming from the kitchen with a plate of mutton. "But first he should eat something."

Brother-in-law agreed and put down the beer. I cut the mutton with a knife that Brother-in-law always kept inside a sheath attached to his belt. Usually, he wouldn't let anybody touch it, saying it was an antique passed down from his ancestors. But because Losar is a time to be kind and generous, he let me use it.

I don't really remember how time passed. I only remember Brother-in-law forcing me to drink with people from his village. Later, I woke up on the *hyitsi* in Sister's home and realized it was already the second day of Losar.

"Oh, Three Jewels!" I said to myself. I suddenly remembered the second day of Losar was for animals. I got up quickly. "Sister, I'm leaving," I announced.

"Have breakfast first and then go," Sister suggested.

"No thanks. Father and Mother must be busy feeding the livestock. I've got to return and help them," I said, and left on the motorcycle.

I imagined Father and Mother treating the livestock with good bread and grain. I also remembered that we had to go to the *lhatzi* to make offering fires and visit Lhedtsang Monastery on the third day of Losar because, according to local tradition, it is the Losar of all the deities on the third day of the year. Thinking about doing all those things made me feel tired but, realizing there would be dancing and archery contests during Losar, I knew that it was also a way to maintain our traditions. I wished that our lives would always remain as wonderful as during Losar.



Kgeiwa villagers put up prayer flags at the start of the summer picnic in 2010 (Tsiring Bum 2010).

## MIDDLE SCHOOL LIFE

You've all done pretty well this week, but there are several students who have made a few mistakes," our class director summarized. Every class had a weekly meeting to review our conduct and study progress over the past week. My deskmate, Wadma Bum and I were at the back of the classroom. As usual, everyone sat up straight at their desks. Some students waited to be praised for good study, for abiding by school rules, and so on. Some students waited anxiously to get a beating for their poor behavior.

"Dadren and Gyaltsen!" the class director roared. "You two come here!"

Both stood up unwillingly and dragged themselves to the front of the class. They walked between desks awkwardly, as the sleeves of their sheepskin robes knocked the books off several students' desks.

"Look at you two!" the class director said, "Troublemakers! Where did you go Thursday night?"

They said nothing, while their legs shook like newborn foals trying to stand.

The class director continued, "You two went to see movies again! I should teach you a lesson today!"

He took out a bamboo stick that teachers use to punish students and whacked their palms repeatedly. He slapped their faces, and kicked their buttocks until he was exhausted.

"Class monitor," he said tiredly after ordering Dadren and Gyaltsen to return to their seats, "do you have anything to say?"

"No," I said. I had something to add, but I was not brave enough to speak in front of thirty students.

Our class director continued, talking about how to improve our study and what we should do in the future. He complimented me for managing the class well. Our class was leaving behind its former name, 'Worst Class in the Entire School,' and was now gaining a good reputation. I felt guilty when other students applauded. Surely I wasn't the only one responsible for our improvement. There had been sixty students in my class the previous year, however, enforcement of

the nine year compulsory education policy was very lax during that period and recognizing this, many parents took their children out of school. Parents wanted their children to have better lives, but education was terribly expensive, and few families could afford it. Many parents thought it was better to keep their children at home and teach them to farm and herd. The sixty students had shrunk to thirty, and the class became easier to manage. So, the improvement wasn't really due to my management.

The class director's criticism and praise lasted longer than usual. By the time he finished his speech-making, it was almost ten p.m.

"Don't go home today," Wadma Bum said to me as students were leaving for their dorm-rooms and homes. "It's too late. You can sleep with me in our dorm-room tonight."

Since our middle school was located in the county town, it was easy for many students who lived in the county town to go home, but it was difficult for me, because I had to pass through a small forest on foot, and it was really challenging to go through it at night. When I was in Junior Grade One, I used to walk home with two girls from my village, but they had graduated and gone on to senior high school in the prefecture seat, so now I had to go home through the forest alone, which I found very frightening. I had to do this every school-day after our class meeting finished at nine-thirty p.m.

"OK, I'll stay here tonight," I readily agreed.

Our dorm-room was large and slept ten students. Bunk beds were around the walls. The center space was empty except for a metal stove that never had enough yak dung to heat the room. Fortunately, everyone wore thick Tibetan robes, otherwise, students would have been as cold as if they were sitting in a refrigerator. The electricity was cut off at ten-thirty, so we stopped reading in our beds, buried ourselves in our quilts, and chatted. Usually we talked about who was the most beautiful girl in our school, who was whose girlfriend or boyfriend, and so on.

"Now there are only Tsering Bum and you left," Hwadan said.  
"Wadma Bum, what's your plan in the future?"

"Me?" Wadma Bum said. "I want to be a doctor."

"Why?" we asked together.

"Actually it's not my dream," he said. "But I am planning to be a doctor." His answer puzzled us, and we waited for his explanation.

"As you know, I'm from a remote farming village. My parents are poor illiterate farmers whose only dream is to make a scholar out of me, no matter how hard it is, and no matter how expensive college is. However, it is still very difficult to get a job even after graduating from an expensive college. Without backdoor connections my hard work in school will be useless. So, I think I'll try to go to a medical college, open a clinic, and make a comfortable life for my parents," Wadma Bum said.

"That's very reasonable," Hwadan said.

After Wadma Bum finished, nobody asked me about my future plan, not because they weren't interested, but because what Wadma Bum had said was poignant and sad.

"Ding ding ding..." the school's morning bell rang at six just as the electricity came back on. The beds creaked, as we all began stirring. Someone banged on our door and shouted, "Lazy swine! If you're not up in five minutes, I'll come in there and beat you!" It was our class director. Everyone rushed to put on their clothes, as though we were having a contest. We didn't have any hot water early in the morning, so we had to wash our faces at noon when the school served lunch and prepared hot water for us.

We all ran into the classroom and sat. Seeing that we were concentrating on study, the class director went contentedly to his office. Although our class director beat us sometimes, he was not a bad man. According to the rules, the schoolteachers needed to arrive at school before eight-thirty, but he came to school at around six a.m. everyday to supervise our study.

The first class that morning was Chinese history. The teacher talked constantly, droning on and on, boring everyone to death. I peered at Wadma Bum, who was writing a love letter on a piece of colored paper. The moment I saw his writing, I laughed quietly. Wadma Bum turned red, stuck out his right hand, and tried to cover my mouth.

"You two, stand up!" yelled the history teacher. "Can't you two behave for forty-five minutes?" We looked down at the desk in shame and said nothing. "Behave yourselves," she continued, "otherwise I'll throw you out of the classroom."

We had four classes in the morning and three in the afternoon. In the last morning class, hunger was driving me to distraction. I had

no energy to listen to the teacher anymore, nor did anyone else. Some students were talking to each other quietly, and others were asleep.

"All right!" our math teacher yelled at the start of class. "Today I'll teach you something new that is not a part of your math class." Everyone perked up. "My story is about a Tibetan yogi who became enlightened after doing many good deeds. His name was Milarepa. His story is very long and I won't be able to finish it in a single class..." We all listened attentively while he told us Milarepa's story. Time flew by.

"We'll find another chance in the future," he said, thirty minutes after the lunch bell rang. "My reason for telling this story in math class is that I want you all to work hard, just like Milarepa. He achieved enlightenment after hard work. If you study well, you can fly in the sky like eagles and everybody will remember you."

He then left the classroom. We looked at his back admiringly. However, now that the story-telling had stopped, my unbearable hunger returned, torturing me. I went home after saying goodbye to Wadma Bum and several other buddies.

"Six hundred," a Tibetan man with curly hair said in Qinghai Chinese dialect. "That's the lowest price. If you don't want to pay, then I'll find someone else!"

"Five hundred," a man in a black suit bargained.

I noticed these two men bargaining as I walked home through the county town. Many curious people circled them. I walked over and saw a wolf standing beside them with a rope tied around its mouth. A short stick in its mouth kept the rope from falling off. The Tibetan man held a metal chain fastened around the wolf's neck, and the poor animal wore a desperate expression, as if contemplating its bad karma. Realizing it was none of my business, I continued walking home.

The weather was very warm when I got to school after lunch. As usual, boys from my class were sunbathing in front of our classroom, while the girls studied inside.

"Hey, don't tell anybody!" Wadma Bum whispered into my ear the moment I appeared in the classroom.

"You mean the letter?" I said.

"Yes. Don't tell anybody, or you're not my friend," he said pulling me over to a place where nobody would overhear.

"Of course, I won't, but you must tell me who she is," I said.

"I promise I'll tell you once I've succeeded," he said.

"I'll keep your secret," I said as I put my right hand on his shoulder and walked toward some other students. We all enjoyed the warm sunshine. I then suddenly remembered what I had seen in the county town. I told the news to the other students, exaggerating to make it more interesting.

"Hey!" Hwadan yelled suddenly. "Do you know why wolves are so expensive?"

We all said that we didn't know.

"You'll understand if you listen to my story about my grandfather," Hwadan said.

During the Cultural Revolution, Grandfather was a herdsman for his production brigade. He needed to give almost all the sheep products to the brigade team and didn't even have enough food to fill his stomach. One day while he was looking for some lost sheep, he discovered a wolf sleeping in front of a cave. He lay down on the grass and shot at the wolf with his rifle. The wolf howled and fled. Grandfather followed the wolf's trail and finally found it lying dead at the foot of a hill. He dragged the wolf back to his tent, skinned it, and boiled the meat. He ate the wolf meat like a hungry ghost and felt very contended. Unfortunately, two days later, he realized that his body had begun swelling, and he felt unbearably hot. Two days after that, he left his flock with another herdsman and went home. Luckily, a barefoot doctor gave him some medicine that stopped the swelling.

"You came just in time, otherwise you would have died soon," the doctor said.

"Why?" Grandfather asked. "Is wolf meat poisonous?"

"No, but it is very strong. A small piece each day keeps you healthy, but the way you ate it is really dangerous!" the doctor said.

Grandfather ate wolf meat to kill his hunger whenever he was herding afterwards, but as the doctor suggested, he only ate a very small piece each day. Because of that, although he is eighty-two years old now, he is still very healthy."

Hwadan finished his story just as the school bell rang shrilly. I looked at my wristwatch and realized it was two-thirty. We rushed into the classroom, sat up straight with our hands behind our backs, and waited for the physics teacher and another forty-five minutes of silent listening or, for most students, pretending to listen.

## EVENING

**W**adma Bum, you're writing another love letter!" I said during evening class. "Hush! My friend, this is a secret between us," he said.

"The Three Jewels! How many of your secrets do I still not know?" I said.

"Ha..." he giggled.

Wadma Bum was kind and helped anybody who needed it. He especially liked to help old people who were unable to manage such things as fetching water and collecting dung for fuel. He was also very clever, read many books, and argued logically during debates. Wasting time writing love letters was his biggest problem.

Our Tibetan teacher scolded him one day, "Wadma Bum! How many times have I told you not to waste your time on such things! Have you forgotten what you wrote in your essay last week? You said that you know the difficulties your parents face in sending you to school, and you would like to be a doctor and repay your parents. Is this how you plan to repay them?"

Wadma Bum lowered his head and said nothing.

"If you don't take my advice seriously, don't say your dream is to be a doctor. Passing the national university entrance exam will be a problem for you!" our Tibetan teacher concluded before leaving angrily.

As usual, Wadma Bum started reading a book, pretending nothing had happened.

"Wadma Bum, would you like to come to my home?" I asked when class finished.

"Um..."

"Just come with me. My parents will be very happy to see you. We can watch television all night long!" I insisted.

"I want to go, but I have to see somebody now," he said.

"Oh! The Three Jewels! Don't be crazy!" I exclaimed, and pulled him away with me. We walked through the county town slowly,

looking in stores that were still open, but didn't buy anything because we had no money.

"Look over there!" Wadma Bum said suddenly, pointing to a slogan in front of the cinema. It was an advertisement for a new Chinese movie that was being shown for free. I was afraid Father and Mother would scold me for returning late. Nevertheless, I was extremely interested in this film, and encouraged by Wadma, I overcame my fear of a scolding and rushed into the cinema. After watching the movie for a few minutes, I understood why it was being shown for free. It was a movie trying to educate young people: several thugs tricked a middle school student into taking drugs. Without realizing he was taking drugs, he innocently fell into their trap. After he became addicted, he stole money and other valuable things from his home and robbed whomever he met to get more drugs from the thugs. Finally, he was imprisoned.

The movie was very dull, and we were familiar with the main idea from our teachers' lectures. I wanted to leave and patted Wadma Bum's shoulder, signaling that we should go home.

"Leave me alone!" Wadma Bum said. Tears were falling on his chest from the tip of his chin.

I was astonished! He was watching the part of the movie in which the young man's parents came to see him, and the three of them were crying miserably.

"Wadma Bum, you're so emotional!" I said. Without saying anything, he wiped the tears from his face and continued watching. It was midnight by the time the movie finished. Wadma Bum and I walked home silently. His mind was still on the movie.

"Who's there?" Mother asked when I knocked on my family's courtyard gate. Through a gap in the wall, I saw her turn on the light and come to the gate.

"It's me, Mother," I said.

"I thought you were dead, you troublemaker!" Mother yelled before opening the gate. Wadma Bum looked at me in surprise.

"Where did you...?" Mother stopped scolding when she saw my friend.

"I'm sorry, Mother," I said guiltily.

"Is he your classmate?" Mother asked, controlling her anger.

"Yes, Mother," I said.

"Boy, come in. You must be very tired," Mother said to Wadma Bum kindly, still glaring at me.

Father was nowhere to be seen. I thought he might be relieving himself. As usual, Mother warmed noodles in the pot on the adobe stove for me and Wadma Bum and I then shared the food.

"Do you want more to eat?" Mother said. She was really frustrated. She no longer cared about Wadma Bum's presence. "Have you become blind? Can't you see your father is not here?"

Mother's words thoroughly frightened me. I thought something had happened to Father. "What happened to Father?" I asked in agitation.

"We thought you would come home at around ten like you usually do," Mother said. "But unexpectedly, you didn't come. As you know, there have been several murders in the county town recently. What's more, last night I dreamt blood was all over your body. I thought it was a bad omen. Then, tonight, you didn't come home on time. Your father and I were very worried, so your father has gone to your uncle's house to get help. They've gone to look for you, and now I guess they're at school or in the county town!"

"Mother, let Wadma Bum sleep in my room after he finishes eating," I said. "I'll go look for Father and Uncle." Just as I was about to go, somebody suddenly banged on the courtyard gate. Mother ran to open it.

"He's not at school. His classmates said he left with one of his friends after the evening class," Father said before Mother could open her mouth.

"He came back with his classmate a moment ago," Mother said.

"He's back? Troublemaker! I'll teach him a lesson!" he said and ran into the kitchen. Uncle and Mother followed him.

I was very lucky. Because Uncle and Wadma Bum were there, Father didn't beat me. Instead, he just questioned me angrily about where I had been and what I had done.

I answered all his questions like a pitiful prisoner.

"Boy," Mother said gently. "Tell us if you are going to stay in school or come home late, otherwise we'll worry."

After escorting Uncle back to his home, I returned and went to bed with Wadma Bum in my room. "I'm sorry," I said to Wadma Bum

before we fell asleep. "Everything that has happened in my home today must have embarrassed you, since it is your first time to visit."

"It doesn't matter. I didn't know your parents were that worried about you. We shouldn't have gone to the cinema," Wadma Bum said politely.

We soon fell asleep. I dreamed Wadma Bum and I were watching a movie - the same movie we had just seen. But this time, it was not Wadma Bum who cried, it was me! I cried miserably, tears streaming down my cheeks and onto the ground. When I woke up, my face and pillow were wet with tears. Knowing it was just a dream, I slept again, but the dream returned.



Khyunstod Lhatzi, Kgeiwa Village (Tsering Bum 2012).

## ARCHERY

**M**other, I don't want to go to the monastery after today," I said, holding two arrows. I would graduate from middle school in the summer but during the holiday, even during Losar, I had to go to Lhedtsang Monastery to study Tibetan.

"Why?" Mother asked curiously. "You said you wanted to study Tibetan in the monastery."

"Yes, but now it's Losar. I want to rest and join the archery contest tomorrow," I said.

"I also think you should rest these days, but first go tell the monk who is teaching you that you won't come after today," Mother said.

I replied that I would happily do this.

"Son, as you know, there are many students from different villages studying Tibetan in the monastery, and the kind monks there don't accept any tuition payments from the students. Take some bread and pork to your teacher. It is difficult for monks to bake bread, since they don't have much time for themselves," Mother said.

"I will do as you wish, Mother," I said.

What Mother said was true. Most monks were kind and considered helping others their responsibility. Still, some monks spent all their time fooling around, watching movies in the county town every night, wandering around without any purpose, and seldom doing their monastic work.

The fields around our village were barren before planting season, and the village men were practicing archery in them.

"If you hit the target this time, this pack of cigarettes is yours," Gangri challenged, holding out a pack of good cigarettes.

"OK," Older Brother Dundrub said. "And if you hit the target, I'll buy you ten bottles of beer."

"Really?" Gangri asked skeptically.

"Of course, but I'm sure you'll just lose your precious cigarettes," Dundrub scoffed.

"Ha!" Gangri laughed. "Don't discuss how to cut up the rabbit before you catch it!"

Betting is common during archery. More than eight of us energetically practiced archery from morning till afternoon, so rapt in our fun that we even forgot to eat.

Norwud, the new village leader, said, "Heroic men of our village, we will have an archery match with Shara Village tomorrow, so stop practicing and hand in your arrows."

All the men did so.

"Don't forget to come to the meeting hall tonight!" he called as he and some helpers collected all the arrows and the four bows that belonged to my village. As usual, the village leader and elders took the bows and arrows to the monastery so a monk could empower them by chanting over them throughout the night.

Young people keep quiet when many people gather. That night, the men joked with each other before the village leader arrived at the meeting hall. Since the younger ones were unable to make jokes, we became the target of older people who made our stomachs ache from laughing. "Why are you getting thinner and thinner, Tsering Bum?" Sodwu, the funniest man in my village, asked with a mischievous smile. I lowered my head and said nothing, sure I had become his target.

"Come on," he continued. "Don't pretend - tell us the truth!"

My face became as red as a ripe apple because I knew he would make up something funny at my expense and make everybody laugh.

"If you don't tell me, that's all right," he said. "Then I'll tell everybody the reason."

I tried to run out, but some men blocked my way and pushed me back to my original seat.

"Because you don't study hard, and you are chasing beautiful girls all the time at school!" he announced, which made everybody laugh.

"Oh, you're dead!" Sodwu joked. "I'll tell your Father about your behavior at school."

Norwud appeared suddenly in the meeting hall just as I was about to beg Sodwu to stop making fun of me.

"Having a nice time?" he said smiling. "We should start work if we want to win tomorrow."

Everybody stood up. Some elders began making *tsamba* in big metal basins, while others washed their hands and waited for the *tsamba* makers to finish. As the basins of *tsamba* were put before us, we covered our mouths with scarves and facemasks to prevent saliva from polluting the *tsamba*. We chanted scriptures as we rolled the *tsamba* into pills that resembled little lamb dung pellets. Our pill-making was finished at midnight and, after resting for a while, everyone started to leave.

"Tsering Bum!" Norwud called as I was almost out of the meeting hall. Some young people were with him. Knowing he would give us some errands to run, I walked over.

"Would you guys please be in the village temple tomorrow morning at six-thirty?" he said. "Is that OK for all of you?"

"Yes," Zhabu answered. "But don't we have to go to the *lhatzi* and offer the *tsamba* pills to the mountain deity?"

"No," Norwud said. "Coming to the village temple is the only thing you guys need to do."

We all understood and nodded assent. When I got home, I told Mother and she woke me up at six the next morning. I washed my hands in a clean basin with very clean water and went to the village temple in the darkness. Zhabu and some other young men were chasing roosters around the temple yard as I arrived. Uncle, the village leader, and some old men were watching them.

"Help them, boy," Uncle called out when he saw me.

I chased the roosters, too, and finally, we caught five. We each held one, gripping their wings and feet so they couldn't move, and stood in a line. Elders chanted as Uncle cut the throats of the roosters. Norwud followed Uncle and caught the blood in a big bowl. We then put the roosters on a ferociously burning wood fire. Uncle sprinkled the blood on the fire as we chanted and circled the altar in a clockwise direction. The fire grew bigger, and the roosters were reduced to ash in less than thirty minutes. After prostrating towards the altar three times, we cleaned everything up and left. The sun appeared over the eastern mountain range as I walked home alone.

"*Gwei!*" village men shouted as tractors neared our village.

"They have returned from the *lhatzi*," I thought.

"Eat breakfast quickly and go to the altar," Father said.

I nodded with a mouthful of *tsamba*.

The altar Father mentioned was in the middle of many fields near the archery site. Mother had prepared offerings, a mixture of fried bread, sugar, candies, wheat flour, and cypress leaves, and put them on a large metal plate. Fearing I might pollute the sacrificial materials, I held the plate in the air with my right hand and went to the altar place. There were only six people there. Others were still at home. I began blowing the conch, something we always do at auspicious times. The other archers came running to the altar with plates and bags of offerings a bit later. We poured them all over a yak dung fire and chanted while circling it. I continued blowing the conch as people set off fireworks.

"Come to the village temple after you put on your best robes," Norwud said when we finished our ritual.

"OK!" we all answered.

Wearing my otter-skin-trimmed Tibetan robe and fox-skin hat, I proudly went to the village temple. All the archers wore the same style robes and hats. We waited for our opponents, the archers of Shara Village.

"They're coming! They're coming!" Zhabu's youngest brother shouted.

Norwud said happily. "Heroes of our village, let's make our move!"

We stood in a line and walked out of the village temple. Uncle put a basin of burning conifer needles on our route to the archery field and we all jumped over it in turn to purify ourselves.

"Gwei!" we shouted repeatedly as we neared the archery field.

Two targets about 100 meters apart are required. Traditionally, the opposing archers make one, and the host village makes the other. The target we made was like a dune on the plain. It was made of earth from the field, and the target face was triangular. Both sides finished making their targets after about thirty minutes.

"Let's make a line on the right side," Norwud said. "They're coming on the left side, so they must want the left side."

We did as the village leader ordered. Standing straight, holding the arrows that we had retrieved from the monastery earlier that morning, we gazed at the marching archers of Shara Village. Their head archer came out and stood between the two lines. Dundrub Gyal, who was the head archer from our village, stood next to him. People from both sides made various jokes about the two

archers and laughed at them, but nobody got angry. The Shara head archer shot one arrow but missed the target. Dundrub Gyal shot one and also missed. They each shot again but neither hit the target. This amazed everyone. A great archer like Dundrub Gyal never missed when we practiced but, in a real contest, the best archers from both sides missed a lot. This reminded me of Uncle Dorjee, the *lhawa* from my village, who said, "Archers miss a lot when mountain deities from both sides are powerful."

"Go ahead," Father whispered in my ear. "That man looks like a government worker, so he must know very little about traditional things, and his skill must be worse than the others."

Knowing what Father said was probably true, I chose that man as my partner, and we both missed the target when it was our turn to shoot.

On account of there being more than 200 men from both villages, we only had enough time for four turns each. In the end, my village had three points, and our opponents had four. Both sides were very happy, because according to local custom, if one side has less than five points, then nobody got any points that day.

At dusk, my village took the archers from Shara Village to their homes. I looked for my partner and finally, when there were fewer than twenty people left, I found him. "I'm very sorry," I apologized. "I made you wait a long time."

"No, no, it doesn't matter," he said in embarrassment.

We introduced ourselves politely as I led him to my home. Mother had prepared a basin of warm water for my partner and was waiting when we got home. He washed the dust from his face and entered the living room, led by Father. We paid respect to our guest by offering him mutton, pork, and barley liquor. Father, Mother, and my partner talked to each other enthusiastically. My partner was much older than me, so we didn't have much to say to each other. My only responsibility was to refill cups with milk tea and offer liquor to my partner.

"I think you two should go now," Father said when my partner finished eating.

"Shall we go?" I asked.

"Yes, I think so," he said drunkenly.

We walked to the village meeting hall, where the village committee had prepared liquor, fruit, sunflower seeds, and cigarettes

for our guests. The Shara Village archers sat cross-legged on cushions on the ground, and sang folksongs to women from my village. The women sat opposite them and sang back. The other men and I offered liquor and cigarettes to our guests.

"Hey! Men! We should leave now," Zhabu said after offering a bowl of barley liquor to his partner. "It's almost midnight."

"Did they say they are going to start now?" I asked Zhabu quietly.

"Yes," Zhabu said. "The head archer whispered that to me when I was offering liquor."

We heard a Shara villager singing melodiously as we walked to our village temple. We paused for a moment and listened. As soon as the man finished, a girl from my village sang back. "They are having a nice time, right?" I said to the others.

"You can join them if you don't feel shy singing love songs in front of your female relatives," Zhabu joked.

"I'm not that shameless," I replied.

"Don't worry," Tsebum Gyal said. "We'll receive the same treatment in their village the day after tomorrow."

"Right, let's go do our work," Zhabu said, and we continued on to the village temple while listening to Tsebum Gyal sing a folksong.

"You two don't have to make *tsamba* pills tonight," Norwud said to Zhabu and me as we were about to start our pill making.

"Why?" I asked.

"Put on warm clothes and go to the altar instead," he advised. Zhabu and I left the village temple and went to the altar in the fields.

"We are honored to protect the sacrificial materials tonight," I said, looking toward the village meeting hall, where lights would be on all night.

"Yes," Zhabu said, "but I don't think the archers from Shara Village would dare approach our altar, but we should be careful. If they dare come and put something unclean here, then that would be bad luck for us, and we'd surely lose."

"You're right," I said.

We remained by the altar, talking the whole night, not daring to sleep. In the morning, as women from my village were returning home, Uncle Dorjee, the *lhawa*, came and replaced us. Zhabu and I went to the meeting hall to escort our partners to our homes for breakfast. Others were waiting for their partners as we entered the

meeting hall. People were scattered about, sleeping on mattresses. We then found our partners and took them separately to our homes. Mother made pork dumplings that morning, which we ate, and then went to the archery field together. Everyone looked very sleepy when we started the contest, but they all perked up when their partners appeared.

"Tsering Bum," Sodwu called as my partner and I were having our turn. "Look at your partner's eyes. They're as red as blood. What did you do to him?"

"Nothing," I said. "But he must have really enjoyed himself last night," which caused much laughter.

Our contest ended with my village having four points and our opponents three. Then, incredibly, our village leader, Norwud, who was a poor archer, hit the target at the last moment, bringing us victory.

"It's almost three o'clock, so we must go now," the Shara Village leader said when we invited our partners for lunch. "Otherwise it will get dark, and we'll have trouble going home, since few of our tractors have headlights."

"Yes, you're right," Dundrub Gyal said. "Safety is important, but our gift still hasn't arrived. Please wait a bit."

Some men came about ten minutes later with bottles of barley liquor and packs of cigarettes. I offered my partner a cup of liquor when I saw others doing this. The village women started singing folksongs and offering barley liquor too. The men of my village were bystanders, and enjoying their singing.

"Please sing a folksong or drink this bowl of liquor," the women said to the Shara men. "If you don't do one of these two things, the way to your home is closed."

The men who were brave and had good voices sang and were then allowed to get into their tractors. Shy men bought their tickets home by drinking big bowls of barley liquor.

"Please take this as a Losar gift," Norwud said, holding out two bricks of tea, three bottles of good quality barley liquor, and a white *khadag*. "The gift is small, but it represents our sincere hearts."

The Shara Village leader accepted our gift.

"Drink this bowl, just this one," the women from my village urged, chasing a man who was about to get in a trailer. Even though he was already intoxicated, he happily drank the bowl of liquor.

Our guests left our village when the women finally released them. They waved goodbye tipsily as the tractors slowly crept into the distance. "The Three Jewels!" I said to myself as I saw some men barely able to stand in the trailers. "They are totally drunk!"

"Ha!" Tsebum Gyal laughed. "Don't worry, we leave for their village tomorrow, and we'll stay there for two days."

"So?" I said.

"You'll get the same treatment," Tsebum Gyal said.

I laughed loudly and Tsebum Gyal joined me.



Village men practice archery (Tsering Bum 2010).

## TRAGEDY

**I**t was a beautiful summer that will live vividly in my memory for the rest of my life. When I was about to graduate from the Tibetan junior middle school, my parents decided to send me to Tsolho Tibetan School in the prefecture seat. I needed to pass a difficult exam, so I had to spend more time than usual studying. The exam was in June. The school held a sports meeting in May, which was a burden for graduating students. The headmaster decided to schedule the sports meeting for May twentieth, insisting, instead, that we study singing and dancing. Some students made a dancing team of five girls and five boys, while every afternoon the rest of us practiced the shot put, throwing the javelin, and long distance running. The only person who had nothing to do was Sonam Gyal, who was fat and easily became exhausted during exercise. In order to ensure a memorable reputation for our class, we all threw ourselves in to our work enthusiastically. In the mornings and evenings, we also studied hard for our approaching exam.

One hot afternoon, as we were resting in the classroom, hiding from the burning sun, Sonam Gyal said, "Monitor, do I have anything else to do?"

"No," I said. "Your sole responsibility is to supervise our work. Tell me if anyone won't listen to you and I'll deal with it."

"OK," Sonam Gyal said.

Renchen joked, "You'll be a champion if there is a festival like the one last year at Lhedtsang Monastery."

Sonam Gyal stood up angrily, went up to Renchen, and grabbed his neck. Renchen struggled like a trapped pigeon in the talons of a powerful eagle. All the girls screamed, which brought students from neighboring classrooms running. Some of us quickly went over and separated them.

"Be careful!" Sonam Gyal said. "I'll make an example of whoever dares to poke fun at me in the future!" and stormed out of the classroom.

"You really went too far this time, Renchen," I scolded after we chased away the students from neighboring classes.

"I know..." Renchen said, still breathing heavily. "I was only joking. Anyway, I'll apologize to him this evening."

Lhedtsang Monastery had built a new temple the previous year and then invited all the local people, including all the Tibetan students, to a feast. All the students from our school, led by headmasters and Tibetan teachers, visited. We circumambulated the monastery three times and visited the temples. Finally, directed by a few monks, we entered the temple hall to enjoy a feast. The monks were very generous, and had prepared newly fried bread, mutton, biscuits, *tsamba* cakes, and other delicious food. We almost killed ourselves from overeating, not because we were greedy, but because the monks constantly urged us to eat this, eat that, and it was impolite to refuse. When we stood up and walked out of the temple hall, the monks grabbed hold of the last person walking out of the temple. This happened to be Sonam Gyal. "Come on, we want to see how much you weigh!" shouted the monks as one held Sonam Gyal in his arms.

"Let me go! Let me go, please!" Sonam Gyal cried out in embarrassment, struggling.

"Who's he? Which class is he in?" students whispered. Seeing Sonam Gyal's face as red as blood, the monks finally released him.

In fact, it is a local custom that after a feast, the host catches the last person and holds them in their arms, pretending to weigh them.

"Why did they embarrass me?" Sonam Gyal asked in irritation as we walked back to school.

"Don't you know?" I said. "That's the custom. You were the last one to leave the temple hall, so they weighed you to see how much you had eaten. If you were very heavy, then that would be a great compliment to the hosts. They'd think that what they prepared was wonderful, and the guests enjoyed it."

"I now understand and respect this custom," Sonam Gyal said, "but it is too late. I will surely be a laughingstock at school." And, as Sonam Gyal predicted, others did make fun of him. "Do you know why you're so fat? Because you ate too much in the monastery!" "Guys, hurry to the dining-room before Sonam Gyal, otherwise he'll finish everything, leaving nothing for us!" These comments wounded

him deeply, but he kept quiet. Unfortunately, that day, this silent volcano had exploded.

As the sports meeting drew near, every class practiced hard, in the hope of winning prizes. Fearing other classes would learn our class's newly created dances, we had people stand in front of our classroom, protecting our creations from being stolen. We were sure a big prize would reward our efforts.

The dance contest was on the first day of the sports meeting, but the results would not be announced until the end. As I walked home for supper, I was still very excited about having a race the next day against students who were poor at running. I was fated, I thought, to earn a prize for my class and for myself. While I was passing Uncle's home, I saw many people coming and going without their hats on.

"What happened?" I asked Father who was approaching me, wearing a distressed expression. Before he could answer, I heard miserable cries. Suddenly, I understood everything and raced into Uncle's home.

Uncle had been diagnosed with stomach cancer the previous year. Unfortunately, Aunt had also been diagnosed with lung cancer six months earlier. I was sure one of them had passed away. When I got inside, I saw Uncle on the *hyitsi*, chanting scriptures in a voice filled with sadness. Uncle's youngest son sat beside him, crying quietly. Aunt's corpse was laid out in front of them. Aunt was as thin and small as a child. Tears blurred my eyes.

"There is something you need to do outside," our village leader, Norwud, said to me.

Instead of listening to him, I fell to my knees and wept. Norwud put his hands on my shoulders and gently led me out of the room.

"Write down the names of those who bring things," he said, handing me a pen and notebook. I sat in front of a desk, as directed. Villagers brought bottles of canola oil, baskets of cow dung, bricks of tea, and even a few pieces of silk. I wrote the names of all those who came and what they had brought. When they realized that Aunt's body would be taken to Chabcha to be cremated that night, Uncle's sons and daughters wailed even more loudly than before. People stopped bringing things after darkness fell.

Villagers forced all my relatives to go into the house at midnight. Norwud gave prayer wheels to my cousins and me, and told us to sit on the ground in the family shrine and spin them. Followed by pitiful wails, Aunt's body was taken away in a car by some villagers and Norwud. I turned the prayer wheel silently the whole night, and didn't cry any more. My mind was occupied by one thought all night, a hateful thought toward this unequal world. "Why isn't there a way to cure cancer?" That night, I decided what my goal in life was. I wanted to be a doctor. Even if I couldn't be a doctor who cured cancer, I thought I could help many people by reducing their pain.

"Tsering Bum, don't be so sad," Wadma Bum said to comfort me the next day when I was back at home. Gongchud Jad and Sonam Gyal were also with him.

"It's all right, all right," I muttered.

"Our class director sent us," Wadma Bum continued. "Will you return to school?"

"No," I said. "I think it's impossible for me to attend school now."

"Why?" Sonam Gyal asked.

"I'll be very busy from tomorrow on. My relatives will do rituals at Lhedtsang, Kumbum, and Shachun monasteries."

"How about the exam?" Gongchud Jad asked.

"I'll only come on that day if it's possible," I said.

Tragedies follow one another. As we were finishing the rituals in the monasteries for Aunt, Uncle passed away, cutting me off from that wonderful source of history and stories. After Uncle was cremated in Chabcha, all my kin repeated the same rituals we had done when Aunt passed away. For forty-nine days we invited monks to chant and gave them good food. In return, the monks prayed for Uncle to have a good next incarnation. We had very little contact with anyone but family during that time. I didn't go to school to take the exams, and I didn't join the graduation party when my friends came to invite me. I thought that I was surely fated to be a farmer after I missed my final exams.

However, helped by some back-door connections, I was able to attend Tsolho Tibetan Senior Middle School. The school was at the colorful and prosperous prefecture seat, and many things distracted students from studying hard. Nevertheless, knowing that the school had the most advanced teaching equipment in the prefecture and

strict school rules, my desire to be a helpful doctor seemed realizable. I dreamed of entering the Tibetan Medical College in Lhasa, or Tsowon Provincial Tibetan Medical College three years later.



Sacrificial offerings to the deities at the start of spring fieldwork in Kgeiwa Village (Tsering Bum 2009).

## A CAR ACCIDENT

Older Sister lives in a village of more than 200 households in a distant township. The distance between our two villages makes it inconvenient for us to visit each other. Sister's husband is a driver who usually stays in the county town and takes passengers to other townships and counties.

One day, while I was reading a Tibetan magazine in the warm sunshine, Brother-in-law arrived in his car. He was wearing his usual sunglasses and holding a plastic bag of oranges for Father and Mother. I stood up, put down the magazine, and invited him inside. Father and Mother stopped chanting when they saw Brother-in-law enter.

"What an unexpected visit! Are you free today?" Father asked, as Mother began to come down from the *hyitsi* to cook something for Brother-in-law.

Before Brother-in-law could answer Father's question, he politely stopped Mother from coming down, saying that he had eaten lunch in the county town a few minutes earlier.

"Yeah, I'm free today," he answered. "I haven't found any passengers."

I poured a cup of tea for Brother-in-law while he settled himself on a stool in front of the *hyitsi*.

"Well, even if you don't eat anything," Mother said, "rest for a while before you leave."

"Yes," Brother in-law said. "I'll go home this afternoon. I've come here to collect any messages for Kensong Zhoma."

"My dear daughter!" Mother said. "I haven't had a chance to see her since Losar."

"Tell her to look after herself, that's all," Father said.

I wondered what Brother-in-law's village was like. I had never been there, and visiting would be a new experience. Brother-in-law didn't stay long. He started to leave after finishing the cup of tea that I had poured him.

"Father, I want to go to Brother-in-law's home," I announced

while Brother-in-law was starting the car engine.

Father and Mother laughed, surprised I had such a wish. Meanwhile Brother-in-law had come inside and told them that he needed company, otherwise he would be bored and fall asleep while driving, so they instantly agreed that I could go.

The road was as flat as a sheet of paper, and our car sailed ahead like a flying eagle competing with the wind. Brother-in-law drove, humming along to a love song that was playing on the car's tape player.

When I was walking in the mountain,  
I wanted marigolds to be my companions,  
But my request was refused.  
Relinquishing hope was painful,  
Since it was a beautiful June flower,

When I was passing through the village,  
I wanted a girl to accompany me,  
But my request was refused.  
Losing her was painful,  
Since she had been my lover since I was fifteen.

As the melodious love song entered my ears one line after another, I felt like I was taking part in the annual Nomads and Farmers' Goods Trading Festival in the county town. People purchase and sell goods during the festival, and enjoy singing and dancing performances prepared by the six townships of my county. During the night, every corner of the county town is filled with nomads and farmers sitting in groups, in front of banks, shops, the bus station - everywhere. Men and women in each group sing to each other. Youths search for the most interesting groups, making sure to avoid their relatives, because it is considered very embarrassing to come across a female relative while people are singing love songs. Only on these nights is the county town full of Tibetans.

"Why are you smiling like an idiot?" Brother-in-law asked, laughing.

"No reason," I said shyly. Actually, I had been thinking about the Nomads and Farmers' Goods Trading Festival of the previous year. Some of my villagers had forced me to sing love songs to a girl from another village. I was so shy and nervous that I was soaked in sweat. I insisted that I would not sing, and finally struggled away. "He

is a real student!" I heard my villagers say as I ran away and disappeared into the crowd.

"Nothing?" Brother-in-law said curiously. "You must have been smiling about something secret or funny."

I only laughed stupidly. Brother-in-law didn't force me; he just hummed his love song and looked ahead. Barren mountains and treeless plains predominated as we neared Brother-in-law's home township. It became windy as the sun slowly set. Thinking I was getting cold, Brother-in-law turned on the car heater and told me we would soon be at his home.

"Bang!" Suddenly, the right corner of the car where I was sitting slammed onto the road, and I saw the front right tire roll away into the valley beside the road. Automatically, I began praying to the Three Jewels. The car slid for about thirty meters and then stopped on a cliff edge. I didn't realize how lucky we were until the car stopped. Brother-in-law panted, his pallid face struggling to regain its original color.

"What's the problem?" I asked.

Without answering, Brother-in-law got out and looked at the car. I followed him. The right front tire was gone.

"I don't know what caused this problem, but we must get the tire," Brother-in-law said, looking down into the valley where the tire lay amid the grass. Brother-in-law was in a bad mood and was clearly trying to think of a solution.

I offered to get it and clambered down into the valley. Some bolts had been lost, so even though I had hauled the tire all the way up from the valley floor, we couldn't put it back on. Brother-in-law tried in vain to use some metal wire to attach it to the axle.

"Ouch!" Brother-in-law cursed, as his fingers strained to twist the wire. "The nuts must have become loose. That's why this happened!"

"Luckily, there were no other passengers in the car, otherwise your business would suffer!" I said jokingly, trying to dispel Brother-in-law's unhappiness.

Brother-in-law kept quiet, thinking about how to get to his village, which was still thirty kilometers away. It grew darker and colder, and the wind blowing through a distant forest made a ghost-like whining.

"I'll go get a tractor to pull the car," Brother-in-law said finally.

"You stay inside the car and guard it. I'll return as soon as possible."

"How will you get there?" I asked.

"I'll walk. We can't stay here and wait," he insisted.

After giving me a warm fleece-lined robe that he had stored in the car trunk, Brother-in-law left. I put it on and watched Brother-in-law's back through the windshield. He was wrapped in a leather coat and struggled against the cold wind. He soon disappeared amid whirling dust.

"I should have insisted on going," I thought as I watched him vanish into the distance, feeling guilty and cowardly. I was younger than Brother-in-law and old enough to go to a village and call a tractor.

Brilliant stars filled the night sky as darkness quilted the earth. Those stars were the only companions sharing the loneliness of the countryside with me on that moonless night. Perhaps it is human nature, but when I'm alone on a dark night, the trees, mountains, and the hills become shadows of imagined monsters and ghosts that fill me with dread. I remembered a story Sister had told me once. An old impoverished couple once lived in a village. They sent their only son to school, hoping to make a scholar out of their mischievous boy. Fortunately, it was the time when everyone received an official job after graduating from the teacher's training school. In time, their son completed his study and got such a job. His parents were very proud of him and told all the villagers about the benefits of sending children to school. The villagers admired him and assumed he would provide his parents with a comfortable life. However, he didn't teach responsibly and became liquor's best friend. He used all his salary for his own pleasure and gave nothing to his poor parents. He then became an example that villagers used to discourage interest in schooling. "What's the use of going to school?" parents said to their children when they showed interest in attending school. "You'd just end up like that old couple's child. Stay home and work!"

Maybe The Three Jewels noticed the way that child mistreated his parents, for one night when he was riding his motorcycle home intoxicated, he crashed into a car about thirty kilometers from the village. Two days later, he died in the hospital. Afterwards, it was rumored that his spirit had returned to the place where he'd had his accident, waiting to meet the driver he'd run into. Some drivers said their cars always broke down in the area. They were sure those

'accidents' were caused by his wandering spirit.

I became terrified that the place where the man had crashed was right where I was. I locked all the car doors and sat still. I tried to think about happy things with all my might. It worked, but only lasted a few seconds each time. I slept fitfully and felt that the night was exceptionally long.

A loud "Hey!" startled me so much that every hair on my body stood up. I pried open my eyes and saw Brother-in-law's younger brother! Brother-in-law and others were with him. They all laughed when I smiled at them, perhaps realizing that I had been terrified.

"You must have been scared to death," Brother-in-law said when I opened the car door.

"Not really," I said, smiling.

"Have this! You must be hungry," Brother-in-law said, handing me a small plastic bag of cooked, warm pork. I slipped the bag into my pocket and tried to help them.

"No, stand over there. Don't do anything," Brother-in-law's younger brother said. Since I was a guest, my only job was to watch them push the car onto a big trailer on a huge, flat metal board. Brother-in-law summoned everybody to get on the trailer after they secured the car. I got on, too. Led by the tractor's dim headlights, we chugged towards Brother-in-law's village. I was very excited on that dark, cold night, because the men sang love songs as loud as the throbs of the tractor, although they quieted as we neared the village.

## LHONBU SERCHAN

**L**honbu Serchan, a huge mountain among many mountains, is often mysteriously obscured by clouds. Snow covers its peak, no matter the season. Standing atop the mountain, Tso Wonbo (Qinghai Lake) stretches out below, mirroring the endless blue sky.

Visiting Lhonbu Serchan is a dream for many Tibetan students in Chabcha. They visit the mountain to seek luck whenever they face difficulties or before important exams. Thirteen students from my county decided to visit it one day. I wanted to visit the mountain, not because of exams, but in order to hide from other students who always pointed at me and had talked about my cowardly behavior at a forum a week earlier.

Higher-grade students held a forum monthly, and almost all the students of Tsolho Tibetan Senior Middle School attended. Representatives of each class talked about many issues in students' lives and discussed how to preserve our traditions, language, and culture. My classmate, Kensong Zhoma, and I were to make speeches in front of hundreds of these assembled students. I was delighted by the chance to make my name known to every student in the school. The topic I prepared was about current education in Tibetan areas. Should schools teach science in Chinese or Tibetan? The answer was very simple. Why should science subjects be taught in Chinese when most Tibetans didn't understand Chinese very well?

Each class's representatives made their speeches in turn. Everyone had their own perspectives and strong supporting ideas. Finally, the time arrived for Senior Grade One representatives to speak.

"You go first," I said to Kensong Zhoma when the moderator asked who represented Class Three, Senior Grade One.

"You go first," Kensong Zhoma said. "I'll go next."

I was confident I would do a good job and stood up slowly and walked to the platform among much applause. Standing in front of the crowd, I placed my palms together at my chest and bowed to the listeners as the other representatives had done. I began, "Today, I will

talk about..." Suddenly, as the faithful listeners quieted, I became nervous and didn't understand what I was saying. I realized thousands of eyes were on me. I forgot everything I had prepared. My memory went completely blank. I heard some people laughing quietly, which gave me a sudden headache, and I became even more nervous. After silently standing for a few minutes, I understood I had utterly failed and gave up.

"Thanks for giving me a chance, but I don't feel well today. I'm very sorry," I concluded, and returned to my seat amid applause. I felt terribly ashamed. Without looking at anyone, I sat and waited for the forum to end. I didn't hear anything the others said. The forum seemed to be unusually long. I only concentrated on my shameful performance, which everybody would soon know. Going to the dining room was impossible. My best friend, Phugjed Gyal, realized what was going on, and got food for me.

"Don't take it too seriously. This happens to everybody. I would be nervous and forget things too, if I were on the platform," he said.

This comforted me a lot.

Fortunately, Nanbu, my roommate, suggested visiting Lhonbu Serchan on the weekend.

Phugjed Gyal said, "But we're not having exams these days."

"Must you visit Lhonbu Serchan only during exams?" Nanbu exclaimed.

"Lhonbu Serchan is not far away," Dadren said. "We have been here for nearly a year but none of us have been there. Let's visit Lhonbu Serchan."

Everyone was happy to hear that, particularly me. I thought it was also a good chance to avoid other students.

We bought bread from the dining room on Friday afternoon, put it in our backpacks, put on thick winter clothing, and jumped over the school walls after night class. As thirteen of us walked in a line towards our destination, rain began pelting down. It was summer and we were hot, so we removed our winter coats. We sang as we walked against the slanting rain. We planned to stop in Upper Megdwug Longwa Village the next morning, rest, and then climb Lhonbu Serchan. However, the rain fell more heavily, and the weather became colder as the elevation increased. Nobody sang or held their coats anymore. Darkness was like a trickster, enticing us to

go this way and then that way. Sometimes we found ourselves circling a place in the rain. How frustrating!

One good thing about the darkness was that it hid our regretful expressions. Finally, we couldn't go any further because we were too tired and hungry. We needed to revise our plan. We had to stop in Lower Megdwug Longwa Village until morning. Both Lower and Upper Megdwug Longwa villages are in Flower Valley, but they are a bit far from each other. We worried we would not be able to visit Lhonbu Serchan because we needed to return to school by Sunday afternoon. However, the most important thing at that moment was to find accommodation. All thirteen of us knocked on courtyard gates one after another, but no one dared let us in.

"The young people have gone into the mountains to dig caterpillar fungus these days," Phugjed Gyal said, shivering from the cold. During the spring, people go to dig caterpillar fungus, a medicinal herb that grows in the high mountains, and then sell them.

"Yeah," Jolba murmured. "And the elders at home don't dare let us in." We didn't give up, and continued knocking at the gates of other homes until we finally found a reply.

"Who's that?" yelled a man from inside.

"Some students," I said. "May we stay in your home out of the rain tonight?"

The man said nothing. We heard footsteps and then he opened the gate and let us in. There was only a single-room bungalow in that huge courtyard, signaling that the family was very impoverished. A naked boy sleeping on the *hyitsi* in the room awakened, sat up, and looked at us curiously. "You must be visiting Lhonbu Serchan," the man said.

"Yes," answered Jolba. "But the weather is terrible now."

"Oh, it's not a problem if you are pious. You can visit Lhonbu Serchan when the rain stops in the morning," the man said.

We huddled in front of the adobe stove, trying to get warm from the smoldering fire. From conversing with the man, we learned that his wife was in the mountains with other villagers, collecting caterpillar fungus.

"I was there earlier, but I had to come back to see how my son is doing. He needs to attend school. My wife and I take turns visiting and making bread for him so there is enough for him to eat."

"How old is your son?" Nanbu said, peering at the boy who

was now sleeping comfortably with a smile on his face.

"Fourteen," The man answered.

"Fourteen!" Nanbu said in surprise. "He's so young to stay by himself."

The man glanced at his son and said nothing. After our clothes were dry, some of us huddled in front of the adobe stove and dozed with the man. Others slept on the *hyitsi* by the boy. Sleeping was uncomfortable, but we were tired and didn't wake up until the next morning.

Although the rain had lessened, we were disappointed that it still hadn't stopped. Knowing that returning to school without seeing even the shadow of Lhonbu Serchan would be a great shame, we journeyed on in single file against the piercing wind and ice-cold rain. No one talked. We concentrated on every footprint, fearing we would fall over in the wet mud. We reached Upper Megdwug Longwa Village after a long struggle with the rain and wind.

The sun appeared just as we were about to leave Upper Megdwug Longwa Village, having rested there while enjoying hot tea in an old couple's home. Now, drenched by rain, we no longer felt the warmth of the newly born sun.

We looked towards Lhonbu Serchan thrusting up among many other mountains. It was lost in snow-white mist and we were unsure how long it would take to reach the peak or even how high it was. I instinctively remembered a story an old man had told us while we were resting in his home.

"In about the seventh century, a descendant of Kger Dongtsan, the minister of the Tibetan king, Songtsan Gampo, fled to this valley for political reasons. He was a *lhonbu* (minister) like his father, but he made his home here in this valley, where there are thousands of *megdwug serchan* (marigolds). Afterwards, people worshipped him as the protector of this land and set up a *lhatzi* atop the highest mountain, which they named Lhonbu Serchan."

We walked nearer and nearer Lhonbu Serchan as I recalled the old man's story.

"Look!" Phugjed Gyal suddenly yelled.

We all looked where he was pointing. Unexpectedly, a very steep mountain towered high in the sky as its covering mist was blown away by a sudden wind. Our mouths hung open as we gazed at it. "Lhonbu Serchan!" we all shouted together. Then, just as suddenly

as the wind quieted, it was covered with clouds again. Fearing we would lose each other in the mist, we gave ourselves numbers and chose Jolba as our group leader. He called our numbers.

"Number one!" Jolba called once every ten minutes.

"Here," Phugjed Gyal answered.

"Number two!"

"Yes, here,"

"Number..."

We came upon a spring and had our bread and drank some water there, which gave us more energy to continue. We heard the flapping of huge birds in the mist as we neared the peak. No! It wasn't birds, but prayer flags. After all we had suffered, we were there at last. We ran to the top and shouted in the mist but, even though it was summer, we could only see white snow covering the top of Lhonbu Serchan. We made a fire, burnt the offerings we had brought, and flung *lhonda* into the sky. I suddenly had the desire to remove my coat and sweater. With my upper body exposed, I asked Nanbu to take photos of me on the tallest rock among many rocks, thinking it was a good thing to remember later in life.

The mist slowly disappeared, and mirror-like Tso Wonbo emerged before our eyes. Looking down at Tso Wonbo from atop Lhonbu Serchan, I felt like an eagle, and was filled with confidence. It was almost five o'clock when we reluctantly left Lhonbu Serchan. It was impossible to reach Chabcha before it was too late, so we decided to stay in Upper Megdwug Longwa, where we were sure the kind Tibetans would treat us well.

We forgot our rule of calling out our numbers as we descended. We only realized Gyaltso was gone when Jolba eventually called his number. We shouted his name, but there was no answer. Agitated and worried, we decided to split up into groups of three and search for Gyaltso. We all agreed to meet each in the middle of Upper Megdwug Longwa Village before dawn. Phugjed Gyal, Nanbu, and I were in one group. The wind was very strong and although we were standing only a meter apart, it blew our conversation away when we tried to talk. After a long night's struggle, we hoped that the other groups had found Gyaltso.

"Did you find him?" Jolba asked when we met.

We were disappointed with this question, realizing there was no need to answer or ask about their result. "Guys," I suggested,

"Let's divide up and ask each family in Upper Megdwug Longwa if they know anything about Gyaltso."

We soon finished asking all the households. "An old herdsman said that he saw a boy get into a truck last night at about dusk," Jolba said. "From his description it was probably Gyaltso."

We returned to Chabcha in a hired jeep. Doubt kept gnawing inside me. "What if that boy was not Gyaltso...?"

As we entered the school gate, muddy and looking like road workers, the other students gazed at us as though we were aliens. We weren't in the mood, nor did we have time to care. We only wanted to verify if Gyaltso was there.

"Where did you go?" our physics teacher, who was also our class director, demanded as we questioned some classmates about Gyaltso.

"We went to Lhonbu Serchan," Phugjed Gyal said honestly, "and we lost Gyaltso there."

"What?" our class director yelled. "You lost Gyaltso!"

Phugjed Gyal told him everything, which took a long time.

"All right," our class director said. "I'll forget your running away until we find Gyaltso."

While my classmates and teacher were deciding how to look for Gyaltso, he suddenly appeared on the sports ground, playing football with some other students. Anger flared up inside me like dried wood bursting into flames and I suddenly had the desire to beat him.

The teacher summoned us into the classroom after sending a student to call Gyaltso. "How did you get here from Lhonbu Serchan?" our teacher asked Gyaltso, who was now standing in front of the classroom.

Gyaltso answered that he had gotten on a tractor and had come to Chabcha the previous night.

"Did you know how much they worried about you and how they suffered looking for you?" our teacher asked, getting angry. "You are the kind of person who only cares about himself, who never cares about others who worry about you!"

Without mentioning our running away, the teacher scolded Gyaltso for more than an hour, which satisfied me immensely.

"All of you should be careful," he concluded. "The reason I didn't scold you is that I know how you felt when you worried about

Gyaltsö. I had the same feeling when I came to your dorm-rooms on Friday night and realized you had gone to Lhonbu Serchan. I worried something would happen to all of you."

He left the classroom disappointedly, leaving us feeling guilty. His words penetrated our hearts like spears, and I wished he'd beaten us rather than saying that. Secretly, deep in my heart, I promised that I would never again let a person who cares about me worry like that.



Yhilha, Tséring Bum's family home shrine (Tséring Bum 2009).

## THE ENGLISH TRAINING PROGRAM IN ZIDLHANG

**I**t was almost the end of the semester and we were studying for the final exam. I wanted to get a good score so I could join Senior Grade Two. All my efforts were put into earning a high mark so that I could proudly show my relatives when I got home. Then, that summer, my plans and my entire life changed.

A man appeared at the door of our classroom one afternoon while we were having a geography class. He called to our geography teacher and said something to her. After a short conversation, the geography teacher left without saying anything to us. The man came in, stood on the platform, and started talking. Due to the different dialect he spoke, I couldn't quite understand him. But, I did understand that we needed to choose two excellent students from our class to take an exam with some other students. If they passed the exam, they could go to study for free in Zidlhang (Xining), the capital of Tsowon Province. On a piece of paper, I wrote the names of two students whom I considered talented and capable in every subject. The man collected the papers and left.

"Who is he?" students whispered to each other.

Phugied Gyal stood on the platform and said, "Don't you guys know? He's one of the people who supports Tibetan students to study English in Zidlhang. I heard they also recruited several students from our school last year while we were still in junior middle school."

I then understood a bit better.

About ten minutes later, the man returned and told Kengsong Zhoma and me to go with him, saying that we were chosen and should take the exam. We walked towards Tsolho Prefecture Nationalities Normal School, where the exam was to be held. There were more than twenty students from three Tibetan middle schools in Chabcha taking the exam. I was thinking, "Isn't my dream to be a doctor? Anyway, who knows if I can pass? First, I should take the exam and decide what to do later."

The exam was divided into written and oral parts. Each of us was given papers with several paragraphs in Tibetan. Our first task was to translate them into Chinese in twenty minutes and then translate some Chinese paragraphs into Tibetan, also in twenty minutes. I felt the exam was the easiest translation assignment I had ever done, but I was disappointed that I didn't have time to finish it all.

"Who is Tsering Bum?" a man who spoke the same dialect as me asked.

"Me," I replied, pointing to myself.

"Come stand here," he said.

One after another, he called ten students to stand beside him. We had been chosen to join the oral part of the exam. The others left disappointedly. One after another, the men inside the classroom called us in. At last, it was my turn to enter. I stood on the platform. Seeing the recruiters sitting in the back of the classroom made me nervous, but I was determined to do a good job. Each man questioned me in both Chinese and Tibetan, not giving me a minute to think.

"OK, you can leave!" a man concluded when they had no more questions.

I went out and waited. I hadn't been nervous as I talked, and I liked the answers I had given. Eventually, five students, including me, were chosen. The men took photos of the five of us and introduced the program. The most important thing was that we wouldn't need to pay anything. That night, I telephoned my parents and told them the good news. Father and Mother were very happy to hear this and informed our relatives. Father phoned me the next day while I was having lunch with my roommates and told me he had asked a lama to do a divination, and the result was that studying English in Zidlhang was the best choice for me. It was really good to be recruited into the English Training Program in Zidlhang, but I didn't have a peaceful life in school afterwards.

"You should continue studying here instead of going to Zidlhang."

"What a lucky person you are! You will have native English speakers as teachers!"

"Stay here. I'm sure you can enter Central Nationalities University in two years."

The teachers had different ideas about my future, but they

were all concerned about the best path for me. It is really difficult to make decisions when you have the power to do so. Fortunately, classes soon ended and I went home.

"You must decide whether to go to school in Zidlhang or to continue studying in Chabcha. Your life is yours. You choose," Father said.

"I haven't been to school my whole life, and I don't know which one is better, but your father and I trust in the lama's words," Mother advised.

"Even if you go to Chabcha," Brother added, "we will support you until you graduate from a good university."

"I want to go to Zidlhang. I also believe the lama," I announced. "And I really want to study English."

To be honest, my desire to study English was not because I liked it, because at that time I didn't know much about the value of English. It was because it was free and would significantly reduce my family's burdens.

"Boy," Father said. "Wherever you go, you have to know one thing: study hard and don't be arrogant when you have a bountiful harvest. Remember, arrogance is the root of degeneration."

"Yes, Father," I said, nodding as I always did when my parents talked to me. Father told me this every time I left for school. He told me this in the county bus station when I left for Zidlhang the first time. Mother's love and his words are carved into my heart. They encourage me to study hard and to overcome obstacles that I meet.

Thinking back, I have been here learning English as a major in this program for almost three years. I have spent my time in this program wisely. English has become a key for me to unlock the gate of global information. Through learning about different cultures around the world, a powerful awareness of my own identity has arisen deep inside me, and I have begun to realize the importance of my own culture. I am proud of all that I have and am.

# NON-ENGLISH TERMS

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## A

Ami nedren ལྕ མ ཉ ད ཙ ར ཚ ན ད ར ཚ ན

## C

Chabcha ཁ ས ཈ ག

Chiga ཆ དྷ ང

## D

Dadren ཅ ཏ པ ཚ ད ར ཚ

Dorjee ཌྷ ཉ ཤ ཝ

Dundrub ཌ ད ཙ ར བ ཉ

Dundrub Gyal ཌ ད ཙ ར བ ཉ ཁ ཉ ཉ

## G

Gangri ཁ བ ཉ ཉ

Ganlho ཁ བ ཉ ཉ

Gansu 甘 肅

Gelugpa ཇ ཚ ཉ ད ཉ ཉ

Gongchud Jad ག ཉ ཀ གྷ ཁ ཉ ཉ ཉ

Gongtang Rinpoche ཁ ཉ ད ཁ ཉ ཉ ཉ ཁ

Guinan 贵 难

Gyaltsen ཁ ཉ ཁ ཉ

Gyaltso ཁ ཉ ཁ ཉ

## H

Hainan 海 南

Hualong ཁ ཉ ད ཉ

Hwadan ཁ ཉ ད ཉ

hyitsi ཁ མ མ

## J

*jiao* 角

*jin* 斤

Jolba ജൾബ

## K

Kalachakra ດ୍ଦୁ ສ୍ରି ດ ຮ୍ଣନ୍ଧା

Kensong Zhoma ຖୁ ດ ອମୋ ສ୍ରାଵ୍ୟା

Kgeiwa കീവ

Kger Dongtsan ധେନ୍ ദଙ୍ଟଶନ୍

Khyunstod རୂ རୁଣ୍ଡ

Kumbum རୂ རୁବୁ

## L

Lhadrun Drashiched རୁ ພଦ ມର୍ଶିଚେ

Lama རା

Lhamo རା ༜ୋ

Lhasa རା

lhatzi ഏ കୋ

lhawa རା

Lhedtsang རୂ ହେଂ

Lhonbu རୂ སୁର୍ଯ୍ୟ

Lhonbu Serchan རୂ སୁର୍ଯ୍ୟ ଶିରକେ

Lhudrud རୂ རୁବୁ

longdha རୂ ଲଙ୍ଗା

Losar རୂ ସର୍

## M

Ma Bufang 马步芳

Megdwug Longwa ମେର୍ଦ୍ବା རୂ རୁବୁ

Megdwug Serchan ମେର୍ଦ୍ବା ଶିରକେ

Milarepa ମିଲାର୍ପା

Monch ମନ୍ତୁ

Montson ମନ୍ତୁ

## N

Nanbu ནନ୍ବୁ  
 Nansham Bum ནନ୍ଶମ ବମ୍  
 Norbum ཉର୍ବୁ  
 Norwud ཉର୍ଵୁ  
 Nyangmo Ter ନ୍ୟାଙ୍ମୋ ଟେର୍

## P

Phugjed Gyal ଫୁଗ୍ଜେଡ ଗ୍ୟାଲ

## Q

Qinghai 青海

## R

Radan ରଦାନ  
 Renchen ରେନ୍ଚେନ

## S

Shara ଶରା  
 Sheray ଶେରା  
 Sodwu ସୋଦୁ  
 Sonam Gyal ସୋନାମ ଗ୍ୟାଲ  
 Songtsan Gampo ସୋଂତ୍ସାନ ଗମ୍ପୋ  
 Sunched ସୁନ୍ତ୍ଚେଦ

## T

Tawa ତାଵା  
*tirun* ତିରୁନ  
*tsamba* ତସମ୍ବା  
 Tsebu ତେବୁ  
 Tsebum ତେବୁମ୍  
 Tsebum Bum ତେବୁମ ବମ୍  
 Tsedan ତେଦାନ  
 Tsering Bum ତେରିଙ୍ଗ ବମ୍  
 Tseter ତେତେର  
 Tso Wonbo ତୋ ଓନ୍ବୋ

Tsolho བୁଲ୍ହୋ  
Tsomo བୁମୋ  
Tsowon བୁବୋ

W

Wadma Bum ད୍ୱାଦ୍ମା

X

Xinghai 兴海

Xining 西宁

Y

Yhilha ཡୁଇଲା

yuan 元

Yunch ພູນ

Yundrun Gyal ພູນດູນກາຍ

Z

Zhabu རୁବୁ

Zhaxi རୁଷି

Zhoma རୁମା

Zidlhang རିଧିଙ୍ଗ